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[THE SUNDAY]

SOUTH SHIELDS CHORAL SOCIETY.

THE "SPECTRE'S BRIDE."

With the assistance of a large and costly orchestra, and with Madame Emily Squire, Mr Edward Branscombe, and Mr Bantock Pierpoint as solo vocalists, the Choral Society at their second concert will perform Dvorak's "The Spectre's Bride," a dramatic cantata written expressly for the Birmingham Festival of 1885. A brief description of the plot of the story will doubtless interest many who purpose attending the concert, and enable them more thoroughly to enjoy the cantata.

The story chosen is that treated by Burger in his ballad of "Lenora," but the legend varies in different countries, the version selected on this occasion being that current in the composer's native land. Karel Jaromir Erben's famous Bohemian poem, translated by K. J. Miller, forms the libretto and the story as set by Dvorak, is as follows:—A maiden before the picture of the Virgin, deploras the loss of father, mother, sister, and brother, and relating her last parting with her betrothed, tells how he enjoined her to spin in the first year, bleach in the next, and make the wedding garments in the third year, when they would be wedded. The three years are over, but she is still alone, and the maiden breathes a prayer to the Holy Mother that either her lover may be brought to her side, or that she may be borne away to him. In answer to this appeal, the spectre bridegroom appears and persuades the maiden to depart with him at once. The midnight journey on foot, over boulders and rocks, is made more dismal by the yelling of dogs and the screech-owl. Noises are heard from caverns, and corpse-candles gleam over swamp and marsh. Perceiving that the maiden carries a prayer book, a chaplet and a cross, the spectre lover compels her to give them up to him one by one, that he may hurl them away. After a weary journey of thirty miles, a churchyard is reached, and here the bride is told she is at home. The spectre then urges her to leap the wall, and, as she hesitates, he shows her the way. Instead of following him, however, she takes to flight, and enters a "tiny house," closing the door after her. This proves to be a charnel-house, and by the light of the moon shining thorough a crack in the roof she perceives a corpse laid upon a plank. Then a knock comes at the door and the spectre lover calls upon the dead to rise and let him in or thrust out the living. Three times the corpse moves towards the door to obey the summons, but the prayers of the maiden make it return to its former position. The crowing of a cock is now heard, which is repeated around, and the people coming to early mass find the maiden pale and trembling in the deadhouse, and garments scattered about the graves. All acquainted with Dvorak's works will doubtless expect that in the treatment of this weird subject he would again evidence that remarkable faculty of building up from the slightest material whole movements of the deepest interest, and that his perfect command of orchestral resources would enable him to colour the various events of his story with vivid truthfulness, but we doubt whether many will be prepared for the display of such forcible dramatic power as is evidenced throughout the cantata. Like the pencil sketch of a great painting, the pianoforte and vocal score in the hands of the audience convey but a feeble notion of the massive effects and delicate tints of instrumentation with which this truly original artist has thrown life into every phase of the striking theme he has chosen. In no portion of this remarkable composition is an attempt to charm the ear at the expense of the dramatic continuity of the narrative. Where melody is demanded phrases of real musical beauty seem to grow spontaneously from the situation, and are never unduly prolonged.
