

# The Morning Post.

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LONDON, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1853.

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## HARMONIC UNION.

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At the concert of last evening were performed Macfarren's *cantata*, entitled "*Lenora*," and Handel's "*Alexander's Feast*," the principal vocalists being Miss Dolby, Miss Stabbech, and Mrs. Weiss, Mr. Galer, and Mr. Weiss; the conductor, as usual, Mr. Benedict. The programme also included another important matter—namely, the execution of Mendelssohn's fine violin *concerto* by M. Sinton.

During last season, the public was made acquainted with Mr. Macfarren's musical illustration of Bürger's celebrated "*Ballade*" through two performances, the first of which was given by the directors of the Royal Academy, the second by the Harmonic Union. The great merits of the score were then generally recognised, and a large amount of eulogy was also most justly bestowed upon Mr. John Oxenford's faithful and spirited translation of the German poem, of which several English versions very inferior to his, already existed—Sir Walter Scott's "*William and Helen*" is but a free imitation of the original; the version of Mr. Taylor, of Norwich, though more strict, leaves, in other respects, much to be desired, whilst the translations by Mr. Albert Smith, and others, are scarcely more satisfactory.

To Mr. John Oxenford, therefore, belongs the honour of having given us the form and spirit of Bürger's extraordinary poem in a more complete manner than any other English writer has done; and the fact that he was doubly fettered, by being forced to adapt his words to the notes of the composer, whilst closely following the sense and metre of Bürger, imparts additional lustre to the admirable result of his labours. As the "*Ballade*" of "*Lenora*" may not be familiar to all our readers, the following brief account of it will not, perhaps, be considered superfluous:—

*Lenora*, a German maiden, has a lover in the wars. At the commencement of the *cantata* we are informed, in a short recitative, of the doubts and fears which oppress her in consequence of a dream she has had. Now is heard a jubilant chorus, which tells of the conclusion of the war and the rejoicings of returned soldiers with their relatives, lovers, or friends.

*Lenora*, having vainly sought her beloved *William* amongst the crowd, falls into a paroxysm of grief, and, despite the entreaties and reproofs of her mother, wildly upbraids Heaven with having deserted her. Anon, wearied out, she sleeps, when the terrible dream, ending in a more terrible reality, visits her.

A mysterious serenade is heard. *William* is beneath the sleeper's window, entreating her to come forth, and ride behind him on his steed a hundred miles to celebrate their nuptials. The girl, after some hesitation, complies, and the mystic ride commences.

"Hurry! Hurry! Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" away they go over hill and dale with lightning speed, whilst spirits hover in the air, or whirl around in frantic glee, singing horrible pæans in honour of the bride. The graves and gibbets give up their dead to swell the joyous train, and celebrate the bridal.

"Hurry! Hurry! Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" onward they go through the pale moonlight, whilst trees, rocks, water, sky, seem confused in one chaotic mass to the maiden's eyes, almost blinded by the miraculous velocity with which she proceeds. *William* from time to time says to her, in chilling unearthly tones, "Fear'st thou, my love? See how the dead can ride!" and she, shuddering, replies, "Ah! no! yet leave the dead!" At length the goal is won amid hideous rejoicings. The moon still shines brightly, and, ere morning's dawn, the marriage must be consummated; but a warrior's suit is unfitting attire for a bridegroom—it must be changed; and now, see! what new terror seizes the heart of *Lenora*? Piece by piece, the horseman's armour slowly drops from his form, gradually revealing the bare and sapless bones, the eyeless sockets, and grinning jaws of *King Death*, whilst, to complete the picture, in those hands where late were held the bridle and the whip, the scythe and hour-glass appear. The grisly figure touches *Lenora*, and she withers. The marriage is consummated—she is *Death's* bride.

Her desperate and impious grief has, in fact, destroyed her; and this harrowing dream, the offspring of frenzy, serves to expedite her untimely end.

The moral of the tale is, we presume, that resigned submission to the will, and confidence in the justice, of Heaven are imperative duties, the violation of which infallibly brings its own punishment; and this is, indeed, expressed in the final chorus, "Whatever grief thy heart may tear."

A subject more suggestive of wild, romantic music, could hardly be imagined; and we are happy to say, for the honour of British art, that Mr. Macfarren's illustration of it is truly poetical and masterly.

The performance was on this occasion excellent, the rendering of the great "ride scene," which for picturesqueness and unity of design may be compared with the best works of Mendelssohn, being entitled to special eulogy. At the conclusion of the *cantata*, Mr. Macfarren was unanimously called for, and enthusiastically cheered.

M. Sinton's most artistic execution of Mendelssohn's violin *concerto* also elicited applause of the warmest kind, and the performance of Handel's "*Alexander's Feast*," though not quite irreproachable, was on the whole creditable to the institution.

For the next concert we are promised Mendelssohn's "*Elijah*."

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