

Literary and Philosophical Society.

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to be addressed
"The Hon. Secretaries."~~

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Dear Dr. Grieg

I have great pleasure in sending you a short musical sketch of mine cut from a recent number of "The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle".

I can only hope that the reading of it will give you as much pleasure as I felt in the writing.

I am

Yours very truly
(Miss) Winnie Hutchinson.

MUSICAL MINIATURES:

BY WINNIE HUTCHINSON.

VI.—Grieg's "Wachterlied" ("Watchman's Song.")

Grieg's "Wachterlied," though numbered among his shorter pieces ("Lyrische Stucke Opus 12) and consisting of fifty-two bars only, is a veritable drama in miniature. This terseness, indeed, is singularly characteristic of the Norwegian composer, whose collection of lyric pieces—musical fragments of marvellous beauty and conciseness, reminds one of the oft-quoted aphorism concerning a dictionary. There is no padding, no superfluous embellishment, no extraneous matter whatever. Yet the music is instinct with truth, and with suggestion. The tiny pieces are miracles of constructive ingenuity, of rhythmical pronunciation, and of musical definition. Their quality, in short, is distinctly lexicographical, for Grieg always says what he has to say in a single word—a word and its meaning. There is never any doubt about the meaning.

The "Wachterlied," incidental to Shakspeare's tragedy of "Macbeth," is perhaps the most subtle of all the "Lyrische Stucke." Subtle, that is, in conception though not in expression, for Grieg never finds it necessary to be cryptic in order to be symbolic. His message is of telegraphic brevity, but it is not written in cypher. The watchman's song, indeed, is characterised by certain naivete. Sobriety it has also, and a Quakerish kind of quaintness, but its prevailing note is that of simplicity.

The watchman, we are sure, was an honest man, for his song is that of one who knows the night but does not fear it. A little sober, truly, a little plaintive and subdued, as befits the song of one familiar with the lonely watches of the night, but not a song of dread. There is darkness in it, but no terror of darkness: the night is haunted, but not with evil. There are spectral shapes that lie in ambush in the deserted courtyard of the castle, and ghostly chains that creak in the stillness—creak, and strain, and creak again. But the watchman cares nothing for shadows! And verily, thinks he, the draw-bridge chains be somewhat rusty that they do call so groanfully for the oil-can!

There is the pallid presence of the moon, the night-long vigil of the stars, the cold companionship of the dawn; but the watchman shares them unafraid, for his life is clean and his conscience clear.

Scarcely, however, have the last notes of the sentinel's song died away in a slow refrain when the character of the music undergoes an abrupt and terrible change. It is the *Intermezzo*, embodiment of guilt. Nor is the music sinister merely. It is replete with that very element so conspicuously absent from the earlier movement—the shuddering terror, the craven fears and nameless imaginations of the guilty in soul, to whom, verily, "The Night has a thousand eyes."

The composer, too, has curiously heightened the dramatic effect by a studied musical disorder. There is no connected melody, no real sequence of musical thought—none at least beyond the deep, reiterated note of horror in the bass. The rhythm is broken and confused, the arpeggios are elusive and shivery—like nerves unstrung, and the chords form weird and unusual combinations expressive of guilty fear and mental perturbation. Such fear indeed and such perturbation as culminate in Macbeth's apostrophe in that dread night of conspiracy and murder:

"Thou sure and firm-set earth

Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
the very stones prate of my where-about,
And take the present horror from the time
Which now suits with it."

But now, with dramatic sequacity, comes the psychological contrast afforded by the Coda. For presently, at the very height of the horror, in the very midst of all these "horrible imaginings" and "strange screams of death"—even while wither'd murder . . . with his stealthy pace . . . towards his design moves like a ghost," presently there steals from without the solemn strain of a midnight hymn, a soft and benedictive music that calms the soul like a prayer and fills the troubled night with peace.

It is the watchman singing his simple song—the song of innocence, the song of a heart at ease, the song of one to whom the night is neither dark nor lonely, for ever through the darkness and the loneliness

"Faith shingeth as a star."