

RECORD OF AMUSEMENTS.

MUSICAL.

"CARMEN" AT THE ACADEMY.

"Carmen," which was produced last night at the Academy of Music, has the attraction of novelty; of novelty in the sense of its being hitherto unknown to our public, and also, perhaps, in that of some fresh peculiarity of style given to it by its composer's effort to use or to make Gypsy airs. We cannot truly say that we think that it has, except in one scene, other merit in any remarkable degree. In the first place its plot is not only uninteresting even to dullness, a fault unpardonable, but it is almost offensive in its combined puerility and brutality. It may be briefly set forth thus: *Carmen*, a girl of Gypsy blood, makes advances to a Spanish officer whom she captivates, and by whom, being arrested, she is assisted to escape. He becomes passionately enamored of her; but she, meeting a bull-fighter, prefers him. After a few unmeaning incidents of Gypsy life, in which the three are involved, but which really have little significance, she still refusing the soldier's love, he kills her in the public square of Seville, and the bull-fighter, who comes upon the scene, instead of instantly killing him, flings himself upon her body, crying "*¡mía Carmen adorata!*" That is all. The drama has absolutely no other dramatic motive, no other dramatic movement. As to *Carmen*, she is a young person in whom we can take no interest. If in real life, a woman, having flirted with an officer, although of inferior rank, and won his love, and having been greatly served by him, prefers a bull-fighter or the like, it is her affair, the public has no right to make any remarks upon the matter. But when in a drama, opera, novel, or other like work, this goes on before our eyes, it very seriously affects the interest we take in that young woman as a heroine. As art, such a design is bad, as bad as bad can be, for it utterly sets at naught that elevation of feeling, (if we do not go so far as to say ideality,) without which art gives no true pleasure. The only personage in "*Carmen*" who excites any interest is *Don José*, the officer, and that which he does excite he destroys by the brutal and foolish crime which is the climax and end of the work. As to the action, apart from the incidents that we have mentioned, it is a mere *pot-pourri* of singing and dancing.

Of the music we cannot speak much more highly. It comprises a few light taking melodies, rather prettily accompanied, but, with the exception already referred to, that is all. We observe that in preliminary notices of the opera some stress is laid upon the fact that its composer is a son-in-law of Halévy. But apart from the physiological fact that genius does not descend to sons-in-law, what would a more direct connection between Bizet and the composer of "*La Juive*" have been likely to produce. That opera, the only one of its composer's works which is really known out of Paris, contains some dramatic declamatory music, which is very effective, and some clever instrumentation; but surely no one is going at this day to set up Halévy as a creative genius or as the founder of a school. Be this as it may, "*Carmen*" must stand on its own merits, and those are very slender. It is little more than a collocation of couplets and chansons of more or less merit, with a strong flavor of the opera comique, (which may be "spicy," but is not very pure—art-wise, we mean,) and, musically, is really not much above the works of Offenbach. It is new, and it has *chic*, but as a work of art it is naught.

Of the performance and the manner in which the opera was produced we are glad to be able to speak much more favorably than of the work itself. Regarded as an evening's entertainment, it was very pleasant, and to those who are ready to be pleased with a pretty spectacle, lively music, and good scenic effect, it may be quite satisfactory; and this seemed to be the temper of the audience last evening.

Mlle Minnie Hauk's *Carmen* was a very clever, indeed quite an admirable, performance; full of character; conceived well from instinct; equally well wrought by art. The *paysanne* character of her pretty face, its saucy *mutine* expression, fit her well for the impersonation of the half wild, self-willed, reckless, rebellious, impassioned and withal thoroughly vulgar Gypsy girl. Mlle. Hauk's acting was so fine last night, particularly in the two scenes in which she plays upon the passion of *Don José*, and seemed half to yield to it herself, that we could not but think if nature had bestowed upon her a better voice we should have had a great prima donna, if one not so good, a great actress in the walks of the higher comedy. As to the music of "*Carmen*" she sang that quite as well as it needs to be sung and better. There is not a passage in her part that is worthy of special effort on the part of a vocalist of reputation.

The same may be said of nearly all of the music given to *Don José* and to *Escamillo*, in which characters Signors Campanini and Del Puente appeared respectively. We regretted to see artists of their merit wasting their efforts upon such poor material. They labored loyally, and, of course, being the singers that they are, and aided by scenic and orchestral effect, they produced some impression; but in both their parts there is hardly a musical idea above the level of opera bouffe, of which, by the way, the vulgar wiggle-waggle is obtrusively apparent in the air which dominates the first act. Musically, the redeeming point of the opera is a scena and aria given to *Michaela* in the third act. This unimportant personage (*Michaela* is a peasant-girl, who gives a slighted love to *Don José*.) has here an air—" *Io dice no*"—which is really beautiful and with an elevated beauty. Its pathos, its grace of movement, its fine development, and the skilful treatment of the orchestral accompaniment make it a really admirable composition. Indeed, its character is such that it seemed quite out of place amid its surroundings, although some little of the composer's unwonted inspiration does flow over into the whole scene. Mme. Sinico sang this air exceedingly well, with a full apprehension and expression of its beauty, and gained hearty and well-merited applause.

In the last scene Mlle. Hauk again distinguished herself by her admirable acting; and the curtain fell upon an operatic entertainment which is, on the whole, uncommonly well-suited to attain general popularity.