

ENGLISH GOSSIP.

ITALIAN OPERA IN THE METROPOLIS—LORD DUDLEY'S WAYS.

From Our Own Correspondent.

LONDON, Tuesday, Dec. 23, 1873.

A pleasing rumor got abroad last week in musical circles to the effect that Mr. J. H. Mapleson had at last arranged to become the lessee of her Majesty's Theatre, which, destroyed by fire some years ago, has since been rebuilt, but has not yet found an occupant. Her Majesty's Theatre, at the corner of the Haymarket and Pall Mall, was, it must be remembered, the opera-house *par excellence* in the days when the Royal Italian Opera had no existence. A long line of managers, ending with Laporte, Lumley, and Mapleson, (who was burned out,) have presided over its fortunes; and its absence from the list of London theatres, among which it was generally the most brilliant and always the most fashionable, is certainly to be regretted. The proprietor of this establishment, which, from the days of Handel to those of Verdi, has played so important a part in the history of operatic music, is the Earl of Dudley, one of the richest, proudest, meanest, and most ridiculous of English noblemen, who, as a rule, are wanting neither in generosity nor in sense. His wealth is of the incalculable kind, and he is commonly reported to have made £900,000 by the recent coal famine—for the calculated scarcity of coal has amounted to little less. Besides land, and coal mines under the land, Lord Dudley possesses castles and country houses in abundance, and, as I was just saying, is proprietor of Her Majesty's Theatre. On the occasion of his marriage to the beautiful Miss Moncrieff he issued a proclamation to his tenantry which would have been thought arrogant from a reigning sovereign. Of course it did them no harm—it promised even to do them good; but it was in bad taste. The Earl is known throughout his vast domains to high and low—but especially to the low—for vices of a degrading kind; and some years ago he was notoriously subject to a maniacal delusion to the effect that he was about to become a mother! "Great wit to madness nearly is allied," and, with all his faults and all his lunacy, Lord Dudley is a man of some talent and some humor. When a certain composer wrote to ask him to use his influence at Birmingham—the very centre of the Dudley country—with the view of getting a particular work brought out at the local festival, his lordship replied that he never interfered with the management of the festival, and that if, contrary to his practice, he were to make any recommendation to the committee, "Birmingham was so thoroughly liberal a city that his recommendation would not only not be attended to, but would probably prove injurious to the person recommended." Nevertheless, starting with the prestige that naturally belongs to rank, wealth, and the power to give employment of various kinds to thousands of hands, it is clearly Lord Dudley's own fault if he is unable to use good offices with those around him, either for social or political purposes. A peer with half a million a year in the visible, palpable form of land, coals, corn, cattle, and castles, must be a poor fellow indeed not to make his position felt otherwise than toward those who, like his farmers and his pitmen, are directly under his thumb. It is not to be regretted that the borough of Dudley should return to Parliament a member of its own unbiased choice, but it is discreditable to the Earl of Dudley that he should take no interest in the election, and that he should not endeavor to prevent the borough's falling into the hands of such an unworthy representative as has now sat for it during some years past—a gentleman whose sole qualification seems to have been that his politics were as far as possible opposed to those of the local magnate.

LORD DUDLEY'S NEW MOVE.

"But why," it may be asked, "all this bitterness just now against Lord Dudley?" Simply because Lord Dudley, after agreeing to allow her Majesty's Theatre to be opened on certain terms very advantageous to himself, has since departed from his bargain, and now refuses to accept Mr. Mapleson as a tenant except at an advance in the rent of £1,000 a year. When, nearly two years ago, the house was rebuilt, it appeared that the ingenious architect had so constructed it that if every place were taken it would not, at ordinary operative prices, hold enough money to pay ordinary current expenses. Until within the last dozen years or so, during which the wealth of London has largely increased, operative speculations were always losing affairs in England, as in other countries, and Mr. Lumley, after taking her Majesty's Theatre on a lease of thirty-five years, found it necessary from time to time to raise money by selling a box for a term of so many seasons. Altogether as many as thirty boxes were thus disposed of, besides the same number of stalls. The fire did not extinguish—did not consume, I perhaps should say—the claims of the mortgagees; and, for some years to come, every new lessee of her Majesty's Theatre must reckon with the fact that about two hundred of the best places in the house were taken years ago, and paid for at the time. This, then, was the position of affairs a few weeks since. Her Majesty's Theatre had been rebuilt; but there were so many drawbacks attached to it in the shape of high rent, mortgaged boxes, and a small auditorium, that no manager could be found to take it. Accordingly, the public were still kept from what had always been a favorite place of entertainment. Mr. Mapleson—the lessee immediately before the fire—was condemned to give his operative performances at Drury Lane, which is only at his disposal for about four months during the year, and not even then as a matter of certainty; Lord Dudley lost his rent, and the mortgagees lost the use and value of their boxes. As most of the mortgagees were rich noblemen, who had advanced money to Mr. Lumley more for the sake of keeping the opera open than with a view to profit, or even to repayment, Mr. Mapleson, as a manager of known ability and enterprise, had no great difficulty in persuading them to renounce their rights, on the understanding that he would open and conduct the opera-house on a becoming scale of magnificence. Then the great Lord Dudley had to be approached, who agreed, personally and through his solicitor, to let her Majesty's Theatre to Mr. Mapleson at an annual rent of £5,000. The lessee would have had to spend about £18,000 in furnishing the theatre and getting the scenery painted for the first half dozen indispensable operas, but before any steps could be taken in this direction a telegram arrived from the noble Earl saying that he must have £1,000 a year more. The negotiations, therefore, are for the present broken off; and to the injury of the public, the intending manager, the mortgagees, and of Lord Dudley himself, her Majesty's Theatre remains closed.

A BANKRUPT JOURNAL.

Next to theatres there is, perhaps, no surer and speedier way of losing money than by means of daily journals, badly conducted. It is astonishing, then, to find that the proprietor of the *Hour*, which has now been for some months before the public, has only become bankrupt for

about £30,000. The *Hour* is not, absolutely, a bad paper. But, relatively, it is a very bad paper indeed, being a mere copy of the *Standard* as to opinion; a mere copy of every daily paper that exists in London as to form and general news. You can see in the *Hour* just what you can see everywhere else, besides articles, imitated from the *Standard*, in praise of Conservatism and Conservatives of all kinds. When Mr. Disraeli was visited not long ago by a speculative Conservative politician bent on starting a journal which should be made the "organ of the party," he is said to have replied, by way of objection, that he knew beforehand what every Conservative journal had to say; that they all applauded whatever was done by Conservatives and blamed whatever was done by Liberals; and that he found it more interesting to read the articles of their opponents, which, though he might not agree with them, were often written with an air of conviction. The high Conservatism of English journalists is, indeed, for the most part, wretched stuff, and can scarcely fail to give a candid reader the notion that the writer, in spite, perhaps, of efforts to the contrary, does not believe one word of what he is saying.

S. E.