

PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

Had it not been for the recent vogue obtained by Russian music in this country, Mr. Rachmaninoff would probably have gone without the invitation which made him last evening the honoured guest of the Philharmonic Society. This composer we know chiefly through certain pianoforte pieces which have made their way into the repertory of the recital-giver, and passed also into the hands of students innumerable. But Mr. Rachmaninoff, judged as a writer of things more important than brief effusions for the keyboard, lags a long way behind the towering Tschaikowsky, and scarcely even proves his right to loosen the shoe-strings of Rimsky-Korsakoff. Fashion, however, counts for much nowadays; and so there were many last evening to applaud the dull eccentricities of a Fantaisie for orchestra brought with him by the young Russian. This laboured work is intended to illustrate a poem by Lermontov, in which is described prettily enough the vanishing of a little cloud from the rock where it had rested during the night. As might be expected, looking at the composer's nationality, the mist rises for all the world like a storm-wrack, while the tears shed by the deserted rock are translated musically into a loud and portentous bellowing. What virtue the Fantaisie has lies in certain features of its orchestration, which, though frequently lapsing into meaningless noise, and mainly concerned with quite uninteresting thematic material, is not without its touches of skilfully-applied colour. The Philharmonic band attacked the work with no little spirit, under the composer's baton; but if the piece has any enduring qualities last night's performance did not reveal them. Coming forward later on to play an Elegie and also his well-known Prelude in C sharp minor, Mr. Rachmaninoff found a still warmer welcome. He is not a pianist of colossal technique, but he clearly understands his own compositions, and the majority of his audience were well content to listen twice to the seductive harmonies of the Prelude. For the rest, the programme opened with a quite inoffensive, but in no way distinguished, "Idyll," from the pen of Mr. B. Luard Selby; went on with a vocal scena from Borodine's opera, "Igorévitch," of which Madame Christianne Audray made but little, and finally reached its close with Beethoven's Symphony in C minor, at the first bars of which there were some who drew a breath of relief.