

## QUEEN'S HALL.

### RACHMANINOFF'S PLAYING.

The twenty-ninth season of the New Queen's Hall Orchestra symphony concerts opened on Saturday afternoon in circumstances exceptionally auspicious. Only upon rare occasions, indeed, does Queen's Hall contain an audience of such numbers, or one so warmly enthusiastic; though in saying this one does not, of course, forget the irrepressible enthusiasm of a typical Promenade audience. Sir Henry Wood's programme gave us full measure, consisting as it did of Strauss's "Don Juan"—its second performance under the same auspices within two days; Berlioz's Symphonic Fantastique, Rachmaninoff's concerto in D—with the composer himself at the piano—and Tchaikovsky's "Francesca da Rimini"—a programme, it will be observed, that held not a single small work. Strictly speaking, one must reckon Berlioz's great work as the most important feature of the concert, even though we are far from supposing that it was to renew acquaintance with his comparatively seldom-played "Episode in the life of an artist" that most of those present had come to Queen's Hall. Yet, even so, the thanks of all were unquestionably due to Sir Henry Wood for reviving a work which, whatever its inequalities and occasional longueurs, must always remain, if viewed in historical perspective, one of the musical wonders of the world.

But there was no sort of doubt that the real feature of the afternoon, in the public's estimation, was the Rachmaninoff concerto—or at any rate the appearance of its principal exponent. The work itself, unlike the composer's C minor concerto, is very little known here, and there can be little doubt that the average audience would find it less attractive—at a first hearing in any case. But that is merely because its beauties are less obvious and because the appeal of the music, for the most part, lies deeper. In the ideas that go to the making of this concerto, as also in the means adopted for their expression, Rachmaninoff shows himself less susceptible to the influence of other composers than in the better-known work, and even when the ideas in themselves could hardly be called very original, one can admire the considerable skill and command of musicianly resource with which they are treated and developed. One always feels, moreover, that those ideas are exactly suited to the character and complexion of the music as a whole, and to the particular kind of elaboration to which the composer subjects them. From the standpoint of the soloist the work bristles with technical difficulties. Yet, in his finely restrained and sensitive playing, the composer never once obtruded those difficulties or allowed any thought of personal display to mar the rare beauty of his performance. A touch of extravagance here, or of over-emphasis there, would have disturbed one's appreciation of playing which, above all, was distinguished for its perfect poise and the consummate feeling for style that underlay it from first to last. And truly it was an eloquent tribute to the spell cast by the pianist that you could have heard the proverbial pin drop at any moment during the half hour or so occupied in the performance of the concerto. But, on its conclusion, the audience gave expression to its delight with a fervour that may easily have overwhelmed even an artist long since accustomed to displays of public enthusiasm. Even some half-a-dozen recalls, however, did not tempt him to concede an encore.