

RACHMANINOFF
IN HULL.

THE FAMOUS PRELUDE.

The Witchery of Donalda.

CHARMING CONCERT AND
CROWDED CITY HALL.

(BY OUR SPECIAL COMMISSIONER.)

One of the most notable happenings in the musical annals of Hull—quite on a par indeed with Elgar's and Malba's visits—was last evening's unusually impressive Subscription concert, to which came an immense audience that filled the great hall. The stamp of greatness was upon most of it. The rest was memorable enough. That brilliantly wayward violinist, M. Zacharewitsch, had barely scaled the heights of "The Devil's Trill" (Tartini)—a weird "grace before meat," forsooth!—than we felt "in the air" that the concert would reach a standard uncommon even at Subscription Concerts.

A MODERN RUSSIAN.

Rachmaninoff was the principal magnet—simply in the three roles of a man with a mind of his own, an original leader of the Russian modern school of composers, and a pianist. A set of four pieces gave us a taste of his strong temperament. His "Elegie" was tender, but manly, in sentiment; one can enjoy such pathos without feeling one is in a rapid decline! And in the "Polichinelle's" tempestuous gambolling, its distracting joys, interrupted for a suggestive few instants by a sadness like that in "I Pagliacci" at the mad futility of the tumbling fool's life, we come very near to the spirit of the ironic composer at the keyboard. But Rachmaninoff is baffling. The "Barcarolle" is so racy of himself that it might have been written to lead us to trace his musical pedigree. To describe its novel rhythm, its cascades of high notes (a favourite resort of his) does not help us. "Approfondissez!" as Napoleon said; the secret, the charm, are deeper. Virile, brilliant, and freakish the "Humoresque," though we suspect a little "marking time" in it, during which nothing important was said. When the impervious, unconcerned-looking Russian essayed his four preludes (op. 23) we tried another fall with him for the explanation of his rare combination of qualities. And with indifferent success. It is, however, true to say that he "plays like a composer." His impassive, peering face and ways mask an inferior fire, which leap forth most in his decisive mastery of vivid contrasts, brusque and tingling with actuality. These fierce accesses of energy proved he is no hawker of sugary melodies for the drawing-room. The rhythmic force of him is something one readily falls a prey to—he "gets at" the judgment via the nervous system.

"HOW WE WON THE PRELUDE."

would make rather a pretty story, if very brief. Acting on hints, the audience clamoured for his famous Prelude in C minor as an encore number. Nor had we long to wait. Without spurious coyness or false modesty, the big man walked resignedly to the grand and thumped out amid tumultuous applause the three doom-coloured notes that punctuate that song of destiny which seems to symbolise the movement of the mighty but sorrow-laden Russian nation towards its great goal. It was a revelation. We had never heard the Prelude under such moving circumstances. How few, even accomplished players, get any idea transferred to their minds from Rachmaninoff's strict expression marks—"f.f.f." and "p.p.p." He made it a voice—or many voices—of lamentation; and even found place for that uncanny Russian love of declination which frightens while it fascinates us simple Westerners.