

PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

THE CENTENARY YEAR.

Last night, in Queen's Hall, our lusty old Philharmonic Society entered upon its hundredth year of active and uninterrupted existence, when its first concert of the season took place. Of the happenings during that period of time we have no intention of speaking just now. Time enough for that when the actual centenary is looming large upon the near horizon. For the moment, it is enough to confine attention to the doings of this opening night. We may (or, incidentally, may not) be forgiven for pointing out, however, that on this the opening night of the hundredth season of that which purports to be our premier orchestral society, it was impossible not to regret that after 100 years the said society presumably felt bound to fill its programme with Russian, Saxon, and Hungarian music only, to engage for the occasion a Dutch conductor, even though he be a super-man with the bâton, and a Russian pianist. Never mind, however. It is a poor heart that never rejoices, and, after all, the title, "Philharmonic Society," is presumably British, and it existed 100 years ago—and that is something.

And what did all this music amount to? We had an excellent performance of Schumann's D minor Symphony, which, like its fellows, is now relegated to the limbo of half-forgotten things, and a gloriously, superbly beautiful performance of Tchaikowsky's "Romeo et Juliette"—these among other things. But one of these other things can not be dumped down, for it was said to be new, and there is much virtue in that which is new, especially if it be imported.

The new thing was a Pianoforte Concerto by Rachmaninoff in D minor, his third, and his Opus 30. Moreover, the composer played the pianoforte part. All over the surface of this work the bubbles rose, broke, and disappeared. Bubbles were here, were there, were everywhere, just precisely like the bubbles that must have frothed up on scores of occasions during the 100 years of the Philharmonic's life. These were no better (and no worse) than many of their predecessors. Indeed, they much resembled a myriad we ourselves have seen (or heard) in far less than 100 years, and they conveyed precisely the same meaning, no more, no less. In other words, Mr. Rachmaninoff's Concerto is a superficial, delicate, tuneful composition, a work full of dainty small-talk, and so of not the least moment, for we take the risk of prophesying that it will be forgotten before the venerable society celebrates its second centenary. It was well played and well received, as nearly all Russian music is received over here. We have often wondered in the past if St. Petersburg is as devoted to all and sundry "Russian" music as is our own London, and we are still wondering. But Mengelberg!—there is a "world conductor," of the race of supermen in his walk in life. He, at any rate, will always be welcome where the sun shines.