

5th July, 1918 (local news)

BRAHMS' REQUIEM. We would remind our readers that the open-air performance of this work by Mr. Francis Foote's Choir takes place in the beautiful gardens of Bredbury on Wednesday next.

12th July 1918

ORATORIO AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

THE FRANCIS J. FOOTE CHOIR'S NOBLE PERFORMANCE OF BRAHMS' "REQUIEM."

Pleasant memories are cherished in Tunbridge Wells concerning the festival performance given by the Francis J. Foote Choir last year in the lovely restful gardens of "Bredbury," Mount Ephraim, of Mendelssohn's "Elijah." Anticipations were naturally rife that a similar pleasure would be enjoyed on Wednesday at 5.30, when the grounds were again very kindly promised by Mr. and Mrs. T. J. G. Duncanson to the same Choir for their concert in aid of the St. Dunstan's Homes for Blinded Soldiers. The climatic conditions having changed rather suddenly, however, the performance—to the disappointment of music-lovers who enjoy hearing a great choral work in the open-air—was given at the Great Hall instead.

The work chosen on this occasion was Brahms' noble "Requiem," with which Mr. Foote is on terms of the greatest intimacy, and can always be relied upon for thoroughly spiritual and uplifting reading of this wonderful oratorio of comfort, hope and victory, the entire service of all these attributes being the Holy Writ upon which the composer founded his music sermon for the universe. About a month ago the same work was given before a crowded and appreciative audience at Eastbourne by Mr. Foote's Choral and Orchestral Societies, and the general opinion expressed was that never before had the town enjoyed such a rich musical treat.

On that occasion, as well as on Wednesday evening, the Conductor was supported in an entirely whole-hearted manner by his loyal forces; and the solo parts were sustained by Miss Ada Forrest (soprano) and Mr. Dan Richards (bass). The music, so inspiring to a war-worn world, tired with conflicting thoughts, yet always braced up for more sacrifice, carried its true message of comfort and consolation to the audience in the Great Hall. The magnetic force of the Conductor was transmitted to every department of his finely-equipped choir; the sopranos sang as if were with one voice, and the harmonies produced were always lofty, and as though the music was intended to appeal to the mind and not only to the senses. In short, the spirit of the mighty Brahms pervaded his work, and in every soulful passage he lived again to comfort the world in troublous times. There are few musicians of our time who understand the great modern composer in the same way that Mr. Foote understands him, and Tunbridge Wells and some of the Sussex towns, too, should be grateful that they have the influence of his genius and understanding about them. The opening chorus of the "Requiem," "Blessed are they that mourn," was an indication that the choir was up to its usual high standard of "form." There was not a phrase in the whole of that comforting passage that was not imbued with musicianly tone and the harmony of great thoughts, and as the choir soared to height after height, reaching their second great climax in the praise fugue, and the final climax of the vision revealed "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord henceforth: yea, with the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them," they seemed transfixed by the glory of the work they had undertaken. It was so at

Eastbourne, and the same impression prevailed at Tunbridge Wells, and those who have heard the "Requiem" performed by festival choirs in festival towns declared that the interpretation given by the Francis J. Foote Choir could not have been surpassed in its grand choral portions. Mr. Dan Richards held the audience at a tension during his rich and impressive rendering of "Lord make me to know" and again in the majestic solo, "Here on earth have we no continuing place," his deep resonant voice made every note tell. Miss Ada Forrest, with whom every choirmaster feels so sure because of her

sound technique and the artistic feeling with which she sings, did well in the soprano music, "Ye now are sorrowful," the choir supporting her admirably in the chorus, "Yea, I will comfort you as one whom his own mother comforteth." The assured confidence (without self-confidence) with which this portion of the work was rendered, should alone have rejoiced the heart of the choir-master and have made him certain that all the trouble he has taken for many years to attain his ideal in making the best music loved for its own sake intrinsically has been worth while. They who sing it thus must certainly love it, and how can they who listen do otherwise?

The splendid professional orchestra, including members of Sir Henry Woods', Sir Thomas Beecham's and the Royal Academy Orchestras, enhanced the enjoyment enormously, and the reverent manner in which the work was handled accounted for the note of success that sounded so clear and true from start to finish.

Mr. Francis J. Foote writes us expressing his sincere regrets to the large number of the public who were unable to gain admission to the performance. He adds:—The entire seating accommodation of the Great Hall was absorbed within a few minutes of the opening of the doors. It was distressing to me to see the stream of keenly disappointed people turned away and denied the privilege of hearing Brahms' might work, although with the splendid support of my choir and orchestra, I did my best to meet the unfortunate exigencies of the moment by deciding upon a repeat performance within half-an-hour of the first one, of which an overflow audience of about 300 availed themselves. Yet, for many reasons, a large number of those who sought admission in vain to the first performance were not able to avail themselves of the later one. I regret this the more for, whilst the first rendering of the "Requiem" was in my judgment splendidly given, the combined choir and orchestra sang and played the second time as if under a great inspiration, and it was memorable. May I say how much I value the many tokens I have had, and continue to have, of the deepest appreciation expressed of the uplifting and ennobling influence of the performance from many of those present, which represented the high and low, rich and poor of the community. I am convinced that the more opportunities we have of hearing performances in these unbalancing days of such works as Brahms' "Requiem" (a work supreme in the whole realm of musical creations), the better for us all. It is significant that an immense audience assembled within the noble precinct of Lincoln Cathedral a few days ago to hear Brahms' masterpiece. Had the weather permitted the effort to be made in the beautiful grounds of "Bredbury," as intended, probably 1,000 more people would have attended, thereby aiding more effectively the two worthy objects we had in view of assisting. To one and all my best thanks for services so splendidly given.