

Kent and Sussex Courier

3rd April 1908

## MR. FRANCIS J. FOOTE'S CHOIR.

The choral and orchestral concert to be given next Wednesday, at 7.45, in the Great Hall, by the above choir, will form an effective climax to an unusually active musical season. It will be the second concert given by them this winter, which speaks well for the capacity, and the enthusiasm which must exist among the members, to make such a result possible. It is well that our readers should know something of the truly artistic efforts made by this choir and their conductor. Their work is receiving increasing recognition by a widening circle of friends, and devotees to the great classical school. We understand that the choir is in splendid form, and an impressive performance may be safely predicted. The wonderful Requiem of Brahms gives great scope for choral display. The programme shows that the orchestra will be by far the largest and most brilliant body of professional musicians which have visited our town. Herr Hans Wessely is a great favourite here as elsewhere. The unbounded enthusiasm which he invariably creates during the performance of the Tchaikovsky concerto will doubtless be repeated here, accompanied as he will be by such an efficient orchestra. The programme further states that the choir will be perfectly balanced, made up of the following:—35 sopranos, 29 altos, 17 tenors, 20 basses, all of whom, excepting a few professional friends of the conductor, will consist of local talent. A full orchestral rehearsal will be conducted by Mr Foote at the Royal Academy of Music on Monday next at 2 p.m. Herr Wessely will rehearse the Tchaikovsky concerto. Members and friends of the choir are permitted to be present. It is gratifying to learn that in spite of the plethora of local entertainments a considerable number of seats are already booked.

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### CHORAL AND ORCHESTRAL CONCERT.

The musically cultured inhabitants of Tunbridge Wells and vicinity have within the short space of ten days had an exceptional opportunity offered them of hearing some of the greatest modern composers, comprising Elgar, Brahms, Dvorak, and Tchaikovsky. On Monday, March 30th, Sir Edward Elgar's "The Kingdom" was introduced with great success, and on Wednesday evening of this week Mr Francis J. Foote's choir presented Brahms' "Requiem," and Dvorak's "Te Deum," when there was also included Tchaikovsky's "Violin Concerto in D," with full orchestra. Brahms' devotional work had been performed before by Mr Foote's choir, but its beauties will never tire, and consequently a re-visit was welcome. It was in the "German Requiem" that Brahms established his fame, and from that time of its appearance (1868) every new work published by him became, it is said, an event in the musical life of Germany, and indeed in this country also. The colossal work in question, which, when first produced, was without the soprano solo with chorus attached, contains wonderful originality of thought and expression, with deep emotional tenderness and noble themes; while the choice of words throughout reveals a strong sense of the vanity and emptiness of human life. A few bars by the horns and strings forms the introduction to the first chorus, "Blessed are they that mourn," which was accompanied by the woodwind, horns, cellos, and string basses only. The remaining choruses, some of an overwhelming character, were sung in a truly spirited fashion, when necessary; the fugal portions receiving thoroughly competent treatment by Mr Foote's well trained forces. A composition of this kind, dealing as it does with such a solemn subject, in which, however, the song of hope permeates throughout the work, demands masterly writing, and only in the hands of such musical giants as Brahms could this be done. The chorus singing on the whole was distinguished by a high level of excellence, and it was pleasurable to witness the strict attention paid to Mr Foote's conductorship, being particularly noticeable in the wonderful chorus, "Here on earth have we no continuing place," when the orchestra also was heard to its fullest advantage. The solos in the Requiem are entrusted to soprano and baritone, in each case being associated with the choruses, Miss Ethel Lister and Mr Percival Driver proving capable exponents of their parts.

Mr Francis J. Foote is to be specially thanked for an insight into Dvorak's "Te Deum," which formed the second choral work on Wednesday evening. Here again the choir (singing in Latin) deserve unstinted praise for their meritorious efforts in complying, as far as it was possible, with the composer's requirements, the orchestration, of which Dvorak was a past master, being of a brilliant character, and forming a great feature. As in the case of the Requiem, the soprano and baritone solos are allied to the choruses, the same artistes taking part, when Miss Ethel Lister's fine voice was heard to much advantage in the finale, soaring above the combined efforts of chorus and orchestra.

An exceptional musical treat was in store for those assembled in the Great Hall, and this will be understood when we refer to Herr Hans Wessely, the world-renowned violinist, who very kindly came down to play Tchaikovsky's "Violin Concerto in D major." The conductor (Mr Foote) gratefully acknowledges in the programme the kind assistance of Herr Wessely in coming to Tunbridge Wells at considerable inconvenience to play this gigantic work, and mentions that Herr Wessely was intimate with the greatest Russian composer of all time, and was the first to introduce this particular Concerto to England, where it has now become an established favourite classic. A magnificent performance from the gifted violinist, in which technical brilliancy and beautiful quality of tone abounded, was naturally expected; and each of the movements (ably assisted with orchestral accompaniment) was received with a perfect hurricane of applause. Referring to the thoroughly enjoyable concert on Wednesday evening, Mr Francis J. Foote is to be again warmly complimented, giving another instance of the musical earnestness which induces him to place before Tunbridge Wells audiences, as he has done in the past, music worthy of its best traditions. We have already mentioned the excellent results attained by Mr Foote on Wednesday, who invariably obtains from his singers and players a poetic rendering of the music set before them. Then again, Mr Foote pays the greatest attention to the orchestra, and it is worthy of note that with three or four exceptions it was composed of purely professional players, led by Mr Spencer Dyke. From a choral and orchestral standpoint, therefore, an assurance of success may also be anticipated in the future, certainly deserving crowded audiences on every occasion.