

VISIT OF LONDON PHILHARMONIC

THE FINAL CONCERT

A second conductor new to Belfast, Gregor Fitelberg, gave an added interest to the London Philharmonic Orchestra's final concert in the Ulster Hall on Friday evening, and brought the animation which had sometimes been lacking earlier in the festival. There was not always, it must be said, an absolute precision in the playing. The conductor's beat was not at all times easy to follow, and the result was some infelicitous execution, as, for example, in the transition to the allegro of Weber's *Der Freischütz* Overture, where there was a momentary hesitancy which marred the effect of romantic distance. But there were several fine qualities in Mr. Fitelberg's style, besides the animation, which more than compensated for the occasional less happy moments. A subtle sense of rhythm, for one, and still more important, perhaps, a keen feeling for texture, which was often fascinating, even when the music had no great significance in itself.

It was a programme entirely composed of music in the romantic style, and as such it appealed to me much less strongly than that of Thursday's concert. It depended so much on colour rather than on line, that long before the end the ear craved for a more solid substance. It was, of course, quite right in a programme of this type to place the main symphonic work at the end. But Dvořák's *New World* Symphony was not, to my mind, the ideal work for the purpose. For though it has so many beauties, it lacks a true symphonic grandeur. It is also apt to breed the exaggerations which are too often associated with the romantic style. The transition to the second subject of the opening Allegro was a notable instance of it on this occasion, and it quite spoiled the essential simplicity of this very beautiful section. The symphony's chief claim to greatness, however, is based on its deeply poetic largo, and this part of the performance was more admirable, besides being a particularly fine stretch of sensitive playing and imaginative expression.

Of the two remaining works in the programme – Rimsky-Korsakov's *Tsar Saltan* Suite and Tchaikovsky's Overture *Fantasia, Romeo and Juliet* – the former made the stronger appeal, if only by reason of its greater novelty. It has such a beautiful clarity in its texture, and makes its infinitely varied effects with such an absolute sureness that one is held in thrall. Two of these effects were to my mind particularly striking – the use of pizzicati, which often showed a subtle mastery commanded by no other composer, and the perhaps even more original way in which a wood-wind solo is heightened by using the accompaniment of another instrument or instruments from the same section of the orchestra. Whether music of this kind would stand repeated hearings might be doubted. Anyway, it was a sheer delight on this occasion played as it was with such fire and brilliance, and by no means least so in the vivid storm scene.

The concert, which was given in conjunction with C.E.M.A., attracted the biggest audience of the festival.

RATHCOL