

THE GRAMOPHONE

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THE GRAMOPHONE AND THE SINGER

(Continued)

By HERMAN KLEIN

The Supremacy of Mozart—I.

TO-DAY, as 150 years ago, Mozart stands supreme in his comprehension of the capacity of the human voice, alike as a mechanical instrument and as a medium for musical expression. Without his rare understanding of the art, although he might always have written melodies of ineffable charm, he would never have been able to compose music for his singers that was so absolutely "vocal" in its nature, so rich in the qualities that call forth the highest feelings of the interpreter, so invariably true to the emotions that have to be expressed. In this immense gift he outshone all his giant rivals of the eighteenth century, including both Handel and Gluck; and, if equalled by one or two in the nineteenth it was only in certain branches of the art—as, for instance, Schubert, who was essentially a song-writer, which Mozart was not. Then, again, the amazing all-round ability of Mozart was fully on a par with that extraordinary originality which was one of the miracles

of his time. Not only did he write beautiful music, but he wrote music the like of which had never been heard before; operas entirely new in their construction, treatment, and character.

Listen to what Fétis, the famous French musical historian, said about *The Marriage of Figaro*. Writing sixty years ago in his "Biographie Universelle des Musiciens," he remarked, "The proportions of this score are colossal. It abounds with airs, duets, ensemble-pieces of different kinds in which the wealth of ideas, the taste, and freshness of the harmonies, modulations, and instrumentation unite in forming the most perfect combination. The two finales alone are equal to entire operas, more abundant in beauties of the first order than any other lyric production." Nothing heard or known before *The Marriage of Figaro* had given the idea of such a work. It aroused enthusiasm everywhere, and, of all Mozart's operas, it was the one best understood from the outset. It obtained