

TWO MODERN ORATORIOS IN ROME.

By J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND.

It was a happy idea to give, on Palm Sunday in the Augusteo, the first performances in Italy of two remarkable works of the most modern type—Malipiero's *San Francesco d'Assisi* and Honegger's *Le Roi David*, the latter sung in French. Both were conducted by Molinari, who had evidently taken enormous trouble in their preparation. The former, called a "Mistero," is for three male soloists, choir and orchestra, and treats of four episodes in the Saint's career, the espousal of Poverty, the sermon to the birds, the foundation with Santa Chiara of his church, and his death in the course of his famous Hymn to the Sun. The four parts make up a symphony which follows the usual plan more closely than might have been expected. The theme of Poverty is strikingly original, the movement in which the birds' songs are described is very clever and the sense of climax at the close, with the dying man's delivery of the refrain of the hymn, is very remarkable. Of course the ordinary conventions as to melody, harmony, and such things, have to be forgotten by the listener, but rhythm—the only factor of classical music retained by the "moderns"—is always striking and often felicitous. The composer was often recalled at the close of his work, which was received with genuine enthusiasm.

The French work suffered not a little from the fact that the choir was singing in a foreign language; but the substitution of a reciter for the stage-action which the music was originally intended to accompany, was not a very happy experiment, for the speaking voice, even one as powerful and well-trained as M. Jacques Copeau's, must always strike the ear as incongruous, however dissonant may be the music it interrupts. The story of David is surely well enough known to make its employment unnecessary, and the work would be improved if some of the short instrumental numbers were cut out and the whole presented as a choral symphony in several movements. Many of the episodes are strangely unconvincing in their treatment. David's final solo, from Ps. xxiii. for soprano solo, has a pleasing, naive melody, but many of the audience must have wished they