

A CHAT WITH MISS FANNY DAVIES.

BY BARONESS VON ZEDLITZ.



MISS FANNY DAVIES AT THE AGE OF THREE (WHEN SHE PLAYED SEVERAL LITTLE PIECES BY HEART).

(From a photograph by J. H. Whitlock, Birmingham.)

proved their talent on our shores owe, in many cases, their artistic culture to a foreign lineage or extraction.

In Miss Fanny Davies, however, we find an artist English-born and English-bred, simple, natural, and unpretentious, and possessed of those entrancing qualities which add endless charm and refinement to a thoroughly talented nature.

By her own fireside she is vivacious, chatty, and bright, never tired of speaking in glowingly grateful terms of all the kindness lavished upon her not only by older and more experienced artists than herself, but also by several royal personages with whom it has been her good fortune to come into musical contact.

At the piano she is serious, strong, and fluent: in short, she lives, as it were, in a sphere of melodious enchantment, from which she only descends when her piano is closed, and she enters into the ordinary groove of every-day routine.

The story of her career is a simple one, and the self-imposed discipline of her life one worthy of imitation and praise.

She loves her art, not because it has quickly developed in her case, becoming more powerful, and leaving other arts far and away behind it, but because Nature has endowed her with the gift of entering into the spirit of each individual composer of whom she is an earnest disciple, as well as with the capacity of giving a brilliant rendering of each of his works.

MUSIC—the sublimest expounder of human passion, of all charm and variety of feeling and emotion, the language of poetry, happiness, and despair—has found a vast number of adequate interpreters during the last century.

We English are particularly proud of our native composers and artists, though the long line of renowned musicians who have developed and im-

Let me tell you in her own simple language how she lives, possessed by a devout ardour for her music, and believing emphatically that no truly beautiful style can be arrived at unless by adopting what is commonly called "the old and only method."

Miss Davies has long since fulfilled the mystical aspirations of her early youth, and has learnt all that is admirable in technique and delivery; hence we find in this unsophisticated young artist a result so wonderfully praiseworthy, that it awakens the respect of all who hear her.

On the day of our chat, she sat facing me in a big arm-chair, her little slender hands clasped nervously, almost afraid, indeed, to speak about herself, lest there should enter into her narrative the least suspicion of self-praise.

At every available opportunity she would deftly turn the conversation to the praise of her fellow-artists, and it was with difficulty that I brought her back—reluctantly, I must admit—to the subject of my visit.

"I was born on the Island of Guernsey,"



MISS FANNY DAVIES IN 1884. (TAKEN WHEN STUDYING WITH MADAME SCHUMANN.)

(From a photograph by Professor Erwin, Hanfstengl.)

she said, "but lived for many years of my youth at Birmingham with my dear aunt, Miss Woodhill, who is one of the kindest and best friends I ever had. At the age of five I took lessons from a local teacher in that town, and learnt to play several little duets which I picked up by ear.

"I was about seven when I was taken to a

"At the age of nine, of Professor Flavell. Then I took lessons in harmony of Mr. Gaul, and studied under Sir (then Mr.) Charles Hallé. In 1882 I went to Leipzig, where my studies greatly improved under Carl Reinecke and Dr. Oscar Paul, not forgetting Jadassohn as my composition master.

"The crowning event of my student life,



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bazaar held at the Birmingham Town Hall, where, to please a friend of my mother, I played, so to speak, for the first time in public. How I already loved music then, to be sure!

"I am told that when scarcely able to toddle I tried to pick out Haydn's 'Surprise' on the piano. I was in terrible despair on that occasion while deciphering it in *C*. I got safely through the first notes until I came to look for *F sharp*. My ear told me that *F natural* caused a horrible discord, and I was so put out by the mistake I repeatedly made, that I actually commenced *screaming*.

"My aunt rushed in to see what was the matter, and seeing my distress, caused by the wrong harmony, she placed my finger on the *F sharp*, whereupon I was once more wreathed in smiles."

"When did you begin to take serious lessons on the piano?" I asked.

however, was experienced in 1883, when, going to Frankfurt, I became a scholar of Madame Schumann there.

"To her all my gratitude is due. She helped me, encouraged me, enlightened me: in fact, bestowed upon me that most blessed of virtues—perseverance. Without her guiding and invigorating influence, study might have proved itself to be a toil; as it was, the learning of the science of music was rendered a labour of love by reason of the tender maternal hand which led my erring fingers to the key-note of all music's principles.

"Madame Schumann possesses one of the sweetest natures I have ever known; her gentle patience and unwavering solicitude were only excelled by her genial, tranquil charm of manner, exhibiting the reflection of a pure soul, and at the same time a cheerfulness which belongs only to her.

"I made rapid progress under her tuition, and learnt all that has been of boundless value to me in after years.

"Dr. Bernard Scholz, Director of the Hoch Schule (Conservatoire) at Frankfurt, also taught me counterpoint and fugue, and so helped to equip me for my first appearance of importance in England, which took place in 1885 at the Crystal Palace, on which occasion I played Beethoven's G Major Concerto with recognised success.

"After that, I appeared at the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts, at the Philharmonic, and at many other concerts both in London and in the provinces."

"I see that Dr. Joachim occupies a special place of honour among your numerous friends," I remarked presently, noticing that Miss Davies had placed some wallflowers, the doctor's favourite blossoms, at the foot of a

striking likeness of the celebrated violinist, which bore an affectionate inscription.

"Yes," replied Miss Davies warmly: "he, too, has done all that friendship suggests and kindness prompts in the way of co-operation during my past career, and I have every reason to be grateful to the dear old master for his kindness to me, which words are but poor and insufficient to express. When in Berlin he has always most generously assisted me in my concerts by playing for me and introducing me to the artistic circles of that city."

"You have also played with him to several royal personages, I think?"

"Yes, once in Gmunden Joachim was staying with the Queen of Hanover, and, finding that I was in the same town, he asked me to make some music with him for the Queen. I demurred at first, remembering that I only had cotton frocks with me, having come to spend a very few days at Gmunden, but Joachim laughed and said—

"If that is your only reason I will explain to the Queen, and she will not mind."

"Nor did she, for her reception was so kind that I quite forgot my cotton frock! On another occasion I played with Dr. Joachim to her Imperial Majesty the Empress Frederick, at her palace Unter den Linden."

In 1888, Miss Davies performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus Concerts, which fact in itself is a striking testimony to the advanced progress she had made, for these concerts are only supported by absolutely first-class artists; after which proof of her ability she performed in Berlin, and made a successful tour in Germany.

"You scored a big success in Rome, I hear," said I. "Tell me about your visit to the Quirinal."

"That was another memorable occasion. After I had been elected an honorary member of the St. Cecilia Academy, Queen Margherita commanded me to play before her. Of course, I was dreadfully excited, but her Majesty was so gracious that she quite put me at my ease, and I believe that she was satisfied with my performance.

"At any rate, here is a letter I received from the Quirinal,



MISS FANNY DAVIES IN 1892.
(From a photograph by Eglinton & Co.)

accompanied by a costly ornament, which testifies to her approval."

As far as I can remember, the letter ran as follows:—

"In compliance with her Majesty's orders, I take great pleasure in sending you this jewel in remembrance of the charming hours her Majesty has passed listening to your delightful music. Believe in my sincere regard.

"(Signed) MSA. DI VILLA MARINA.

"Wednesday, April 27th, 1891."

"Did you play again to her Majesty, or only on this one occasion?"

"I played four times at the Quirinal, and on one occasion Queen Margherita opened the piano for me with her own hands.

"Last year I was in Rome again at the time of the Queen's silver wedding. Many festivities took place, among which a garden party was given by the English Embassy to the King and Queen, and to which my friend and I were invited. Queen Margherita recognised us among the visitors, and I saw her most graciously coming towards me with extended hands. She spoke to me for several moments, and then held my hand tightly between her own and said—

"Come often to Rome."

"Those kind words have become engraven on my memory."

"Have you played before our Queen?" was my next question.

"Yes," answered my hostess, with evident gratification. "I received a telegram from Major Bigge saying that her Majesty desired me to play to her on the 22nd of October, 1892, upon which occasion I played at Balmoral for over an hour.

"The Queen was graciously pleased to give me a beautiful souvenir in memory of the honour she had conferred upon me, and to say that I had given her pleasure with my music."

"You are a lucky little woman!" I exclaimed, "to have been the recipient of so many distinctions," as my eyes caught sight of several handsomely-framed diplomas, autographic mementoes, and valuable souvenirs bestowed upon the clever young artist.

"This is my Bonn diploma," continued Miss Davies, "which I prize immeasurably. I was asked to play a trio at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, in May of last year, at one of the concerts.

"Just before going I received a telegram requesting me to play a solo sonata as well, in place of Mde. Carreno d'Albert who had suddenly become indisposed. I chose Op. 110, in A flat, for I happened to have it at my finger-tips. I was most kindly received, and three times recalled, which naturally

gave me great confidence for my next day's concert.

"I have since received one of the best marks of approbation any artist could wish for—I was elected a member of the Beethoven Haus."

Miss Davies is excessively fond of teaching, and she tells me she has, among others, one little pupil—a sweet child, who came to her lessons in a pinafore and huge sun-bonnet—who will give cause for much marvelling later on.

When she first came she was only six and a-half years old, but to give a slight idea of the child's talent and power of execution, Miss Davies informed me that Bach's fugue in D from the 1st Book was then already a matter of easy playing for her tiny fingers.

I may not give her name, but wish her all success under Miss Davies' able tuition. Another promising pupil of Miss Davies was little Mimie Shakespeare, who has made such rapid strides in the direction of brilliancy of interpretation that she has since studied under Madame Schumann.

It has been said of Miss Davies that her devotion to one particular school is so strong, that she appreciates none save the Schumann theories on musical art. When I asked her if this report were founded on fact, she replied—

"A real artist will never fail to recognise true excellence in whatsoever 'school' it may lie latent; although it stands to reason that I may have a preference for the teaching of one especial method, since all that is elevating and inspiring in music was taught to me by my dearly-loved friend Madame Schumann."

Miss Davies is exceptionally conscientious in her studies, for she is never satisfied with what she sometimes considers a mediocre performance. Her ambition is to give us the very best and most faultless representation, and with this end in view she looks upon society and amusement as very secondary considerations.

Her heart and mind are alike devoted to the advancement of musical art and the development of her own descriptive faculty, which carries her into a world of fancy peopled with melodies and harmonies, far above the heads of prosaic *us*!

The young pianist maintains that to become truly the artist a long and thorough training must be gone in for, and that to get at the fundamental knowledge of musical art it would be wise to go over the same path composition has pursued, without altering the chronological order of artistic progress.

"First of all, harmony should be studied," says she; "then the Church music of great

composers ought to be the next consideration.

"Above all, the lives of illustrious musicians should be read in order that their temperaments, idiosyncrasies, and characters, generally latent in their works, may be faithfully interpreted."

"Ought the artist interpreter to possess as much originality in his delivery as the composer in his creating?"

"I am not sure. I am inclined to maintain that the composer has a prior right to this individuality, although the interpreter should try to depict the composer's characteristics in rendering his music.

"Correct and elegant fingering is another matter of vital importance in pianoforte playing, therefore it is essential that exercises should be looked upon as a necessity to study as important as food is to the sustenance of life.

"It is not hard to play the piano when once the mechanical part has been conquered and the muscles of the fingers are flexible, for *suppleness* is the keynote to the secret of executant success.

"It is necessary to bear in mind that fingers need constant practice to keep them pliable, in the same way that wheels require frequent oiling to prevent them from becoming rusty."

"What do you consider to be a correct length of time to practise every day, Miss Davies?"

"Personally, I never work more than four hours, which I deem quite sufficient for any student. More than that would, in time, dull one's soul, and take the energy out of one's application.

"The study of music should be a labour of love; and I always recommend people who are not possessed of a real natural affection for

it to turn their mind to a pursuit more congenial to inborn tastes.

"You cannot force people to love music; fondness for that art is an inborn predilection which no circumstances, however hard or discouraging, can crush, and which, when forced, seldom produces good results even after years of arduous labour."

The extraordinary flexibility of her musical mechanism stands Miss Davies in good stead. She appears to transport herself into the soul of the instrument, and make it talk like a sympathetic human being in its own language, laying bare its very heart for our introspection.

She possesses a love for strong contrasts, and her imagination, which is wonderfully expansive, pours forth rich melodious tones in great abundance, with an accuracy and unity of purpose that have seldom been excelled by any other executant of her years.

Miss Davies is living with a dear lady, who, to judge from appearances, acts as a mother, sister, and friend



MISS FANNY DAVIES AT THE PRESENT DAY.

(From a photograph by Maclure, Macdonald & Co., Glasgow.)

towards her. These ladies occupy a pretty house in St. John's Wood (the favourite resort of musical and plastic artists), where a cursory glance round the artistically arranged rooms, plentifully enriched by curiosities collected from many parts of the world, shows us that Miss Davies has a taste for travelling, and that the beauties of Nature have impregnated her sensitive disposition with their fascinating influence. Both ladies betake themselves to the regions of the Swiss mountains every year, and there, in the tranquillity of a peaceful village, they roam about, discarding for a brief period their customary studies, and enjoying Nature's harmonies only.