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1. ANNA WILLIAMS.
(*Elliott & Fry.*)
2. MARIAN MACKENZIE.
3. ALICE ESTY.
4. MRS. HELEN TRUST.
5. COLERIDGE TAYLOR.

6. LLOYD CHANDOS.
7. EDWARD ELGAR.
8. PLUNKET GREENE.
9. F. DAWSON.
(*Russell & Sons.*)

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FURTHER GOSSIP ABOUT MUSICIANS.

By A PROFESSIONAL SINGER.



HOW many things have happened since I last took up my pen to write to you, dear girls!

First and foremost came the death of our beloved Queen, and for a time the country seemed paralysed, and even now is only slowly recovering from the shock.

Loving our art as she did, Victoria the Great and Good is an inestimable loss to the musical world, for hers was no mere

superficial knowledge, but a clear insight, born of a true devotion to music. Upon nothing flimsy was her attention bestowed; genuine art was what she faithfully adhered to, and though some have cavilled at her preference for the "old masters," surely it is upon their examples that the best of modern music is founded?

Now, don't all fly at me at once! I do admire Wagner, but not (as some people would have it) to the exclusion of every other composer, ancient and modern. A dear old professional, who shall for the nonce be nameless, said to me one day, "People complain that Wagner never wrote a tune; but that is not so. What distresses me is, that where he has written one, he gets off it so soon!"

The remark is absolutely true, for the master leads you a regular will-o'-the-wisp dance after his melody, after the first introduction to it, but like the diamond in a heap of sand, you seize it with avidity when it comes up, and very precious it is.

Well, now, whom shall I tell you about?

Let me begin with Alice Esty. "A thoroughly nice woman," is the general verdict. Her husband is a singer also, Alec Marsh, and both were at one time in the Carl Rosa Opera Company. An American by birth, Alice Esty possesses one of those curiously resonant voices that sound as if they could stand any amount of wear and tear. She has one dear little child, a girl, and during her husband's absence in China at the present time, her mother is residing with her at the pretty little house in St. John's Wood. Mrs. Esty (the mother) was herself an accomplished vocalist and musician, and takes a keen interest in professional matters.

A great friend of Alice Esty is Marian Mackenzie, who will be remembered as first singing the contralto part in the "Persian Garden." She married a brother of Anna Williams, the celebrated soprano, and though he used to sing himself, he told me one day that he had enough to do to manage his wife's business, so unselfishly gave up his own professional career, and devoted himself to his wife's interests. He is one of the kindest of men, and is known as "Dickybird."

An amusing story reached me about Madame Marian Mackenzie one day. At that time her knowledge of colloquial French was limited, and she was staying at an hotel abroad—(no, I shall not say where it was, or how long ago!)—and she was very tired and desired a footstool. Turning to the waiter, she said, "Donnez-moi un bain pour mes pieds."

"Oui, madame."

The waiter was rather long, she thought, but presently he returned and with great gravity said, "Madame, c'est servi dans votre chambre à coucher!"

It took Madame Mackenzie some time to realise that she had asked for a foot-bath! I do not suppose anyone enjoyed the joke more than she did when it became apparent to her.

Curiously enough, Anna Williams and she were always most nervous in singing in public when on the platform *together*, probably because each felt the other knew what she might do, and was afraid of falling short of the standard of estimation. Madame Mackenzie's greatest friend is

probably Mrs. Helen Trust, whose dainty and artistic singing has often charmed London and provincial audiences.

Marie Brema is a singer whose abilities no true lover of music will deny, and her genial, impulsive temperament is portrayed in her smiling, good-humoured face. One can hardly believe that she has a grown-up daughter, so fresh and young is her voice, and spontaneous the expression she throws into her work. To my way of thinking she is one of the finest artistes we have. It was my privilege to hear her sing the part allotted to the "Angel" in the "Dream of Gerontius" at the Birmingham Festival last year, and I am not one whit ashamed to say that her wonderful rendering of it brought the tears to my eyes many times. Dr. Elgar, the clever composer of this beautiful work, will, I know, agree with me that her singing was the most remarkable feature of the performance.

Personally she herself is unknown to me, though her brother is a friend of mine, and I have stayed with other relations of hers, who delight in her talent and success, and speak affectionately of her warm-heartedness, which, with her enthusiasm for her art, shines conspicuously throughout her work.

Madame Kirkby Lunn is a contralto, who, possessed of a remarkably fine voice, yet is so entirely unaffected that she wins at once the esteem and love of her fellow artistes.

Formerly a member of the Carl Rosa Opera Company, she left that body more than two years ago, and has since devoted herself to concert work. Nearly two years ago she married, and has a dear little son, and (as she described him to me) a "lovely" husband. By this she did not mean "lovely" in looks, but, in the American sense, a thoroughly good husband, and her home-life is in consequence very happy. She is a "Lancashire lass," and possesses, beside her keen love for music and fine voice, the "grit" and straight-forward characteristics of the "North Countree."

William Green, one of our rising tenors is "a Bolton lad tha knaws," to use the Lancashire phraseology. One night I was singing with him in his native town, and the greeting he received showed how much his talents were appreciated by his fellow-townsmen. The sense of proprietorship in any public singer, exhibited by natives of the same place, be he or she a north-country person, is curiously marked.

One hears such comments as these—

"Thet's oor Billy."

"Ay! Aw moind un sin' 'e wer' a little un, no higher nor that."

And again—

"'Er fayther were —. Eh! but oo's (she's) a gradely (handsome) lass. She's one o' ourn" (ours, meaning a native of that place).

And if you get a really hearty Lancashire greeting it is a something never to be forgotten, for they know, these people, from the big-wigs to the mill-hands, what good music is, and are very faithful to their favourites. Lloyd Chandos, Joseph O'Mara, and Herbert Grover are all good tenors, and we have had many pleasant meetings in our professional capacity, when they have shown me the greatest kindness.

The first-named is one of the most amusing men I know, though he probably never realises that fact. He has a comical way of describing things that is irresistible, and his account of some provincial conductors he had met, which he told when we were returning from a concert one day, made me laugh till I ached all over. Unconsciously he is an excellent mimic, and could, I believe, make a fortune by "imitations" alone. Herbert Grover is also a quaintly humorous man with a most infectious laugh and twinkling eyes that are full of mirth. O'Mara, too, whose

name betokens the land of his birth, has a keen sense of fun and that genial *bonhomie* possessed by his countrymen in general. Charles Knowles, Denis O'Sullivan, James McInnes, and Charles Tree, some of our rising baritones, are all good artists. Each has his forte: the first in oratorio, the second in songs, especially humorous ones, the third in classical songs, and the fourth is essentially a dramatic vocalist. Each has an uncommonly fine voice, but each voice is quite different from the others.

Harry Plunket Greene is one of those vocalists of whom it is difficult to say too much. Possessed of a singularly agreeable personality, he draws your attention the moment he appears on the platform, and if he fails to keep it fixed on himself, well, then, there must be something "out of gear" somewhere!

In *Lieder* chiefly he excels; whether German or Irish matters not—he is equally at home in both. There is a weird fascination in his rendering of Irish songs, especially the pathetic ones; though I must say there is no getting away from the joviality that pervades the humorous ones when he sings them either!

When studying, he pulls a song literally to bits, and puts it together again, like an engineer who pulls a machine to pieces and then puts it together again "to see how it works." At the same time Plunket Greene is generous to a fault. Ask him about a song, and he gives you unstintingly the benefit of all his hard private study of it, without a moment's hesitation.

Truly he is a great artist, and I think the secret of his greatness lies in the fact that he feels every word and note he sings, and throws his whole soul into his art. A great soul is bound to make a great artist.

It is amusing to see what curious muddles foreigners make of names of "Britishers." Some friends of mine were staying at Bayreuth, and having an introduction to Plunket Greene, tried to find him. In vain they searched the "visitors' list," but finally gave up their quest. Leaving the place, in the train they asked a clergyman, in the same carriage, if he knew whether Mr. Greene was there, in Bayreuth, remarking that they had been unable to find his name in the list. He laughed, and said, "Oh, I will show it to you." And there it was, but under the guise of

"Plunket (*aus grüne*)"!

Whether Plunket Greene ever saw this or not I cannot say, but he will laugh if this paper reaches his eyes, I am sure.

Rosa Oltzka, the operatic contralto, has coined such a nice word that I must tell you of it. Sometimes she says, "Was muss ich singen? Ich muss etwas 'effectful' haben!" "Effectful" is such an expressive word, much more so than "effective"; don't you think so? She has a remarkable voice with a compass of three octaves.

Many other singers I might write about, but it is time that pianists received attention.

My first meeting with Janotha was at an "at home" where I had been singing, and at the close of my songs she came up and thanked me for my singing, complimenting me very warmly. I thanked her, and asked after "White Heather," her black cat.

"Ach, how kind! He is ver' well," putting her hands on my arms and giving me an affectionate little squeeze. "He is neffer far from my heart, you see," pointing to a little charm which hung on her chain, a head of a cat in black bog oak, with diamond eyes.

"White Heather" is seldom apart from his mistress. As often as not you would find him curled up in the large muff Janotha carries, and which she lays on the piano before playing. I know one musician who took up the muff to hand to its owner after a performance, and finding it heavier than he thought it would be, nearly dropped it and the cat, who was sound asleep inside!

Frederick Dawson is an example of what perseverance and a love for music can do. He possessed no pecuniary advantages, but worked alone until his talent and executive skill made him known, and led to his being eventually placed in the front rank of our pianists to-day, while he is still only thirty years of age and has occupied one of the foremost places for the last eight years. He is full of fun

and anything but a serious person off the platform. Ever genial, and highly sympathetic, he is much liked wherever he goes.

Basil Sapellnikoff and I were associated at a concert not so long ago, and I was struck by a kind act of his. Although he must have been tired after playing a big concerto, he waited at the "wings" while I sang a long *aria*, listening to every note, and was the first to congratulate me on my success as I came off. Coleridge Taylor was the second, and the secretary and directors followed. But I do not think I shall ever forget the kindly outstretched hands of Basil Sapellnikoff and Coleridge Taylor, which grasped mine; for if the truth must be told, I had been terribly nervous, and was more than thankful when the ordeal was over.

Coleridge Taylor is a name to conjure with nowadays. One may echo the words of a critic who asked, "How is it that this youth has power to stir our hearts as he does with his music?"

How, indeed?

Such pathos is there in "Hiawatha" that it is well-nigh impossible to sing it without tears, and no uncommon thing to see one's audience crying silently in many parts of it.

By the way, Gregory Hast told me that the celebrated solo from the "Wedding Feast," "Onaway, awake, beloved," was written in one evening for him to sing, and before any other portion of the work was composed. The exquisite beauty of Longfellow's poem is such that I marvel no one ever set it to music before.

Sir Charles Hallé I heard play from the time I was old enough to attend a concert—about eight years old, I think. No concert was ever too long for me; my only regret was when it was over. Sir Charles was a very wonderful man all round, and a remarkable pianist in a classical style; which would nowadays be deemed cold. He stood by himself, somehow, but not in the same way that Rubinstein did. The latter made my head ache, for he compelled his hearers to follow him through all his moods and expression of them; in fact, he took you out of yourself. At the end of a recital you scarcely knew whether you belonged to yourself or not, in such manner did he sway an audience. But it was a living perpetual joy to have heard him, a something never to be lost.

Lately somewhere I read, "No good thing is ever lost." Those six little words contain whole volumes of sermons, and can be applied to every little act of our daily lives.

A pianist who has lately come forward again is Benno Shonberger, and at the "Pops" this last season he has given us some uncommonly fine performances. Withal he is a pleasant comrade, and to be with him and his friend, Johannes Wolff, is to be in a regular fire of chaff. Let no one who objects to being teased get into the same railway carriage with those two on the way to a concert, for there is no mercy shown. It is impossible to be offended at that comical pair, and many a hearty laugh have I enjoyed when in their company.

Ella Pancera is a charming woman, with a child-like innocence of manner, and very impulsive and warm-hearted. We met in "bonnie Scotland." Her powers are too well known to need comment from me. Her husband is one of the firm of Blüthner, the famous piano manufacturers.

Of Rachmaninoff, Emil Sauer, Friedheim, Eibenschütz, Fanny Davies, and others, I might speak, but there is little new to tell. One thing struck me very much, and that is the similarity of "touch" between Emil Sauer and Ilona Eibenschütz. In both the peculiar velvetiness of touch is remarkable, as also the clearness of the softest passage played.

It is, alas! just upon midnight, and I am roused to the fact that the night is growing cold, and so am I!

In my next paper a few violinists will be dealt with, and also some conductors, of whom there are some funny incidents to relate. I must be careful not to say too much however, lest next time I sing with them they mistake the *bâton* for a rod to whip me with, and I am made to repent.

Now good-night, my dears, and sweet dreams to you all.