

## Covent Garden Stars in Their Favourite Rôles.

BY KATHLEEN SCHLESINGER.



CURIOSITY is a trait commonly attributed to the gentler sex and to children; whether justly or not, matters little. There is, however, a certain legitimate curiosity whose motives are beyond reproach and of which no one need be ashamed, for it is guilty of no indiscretions; all it seeks is knowledge which it intends, according to its lights, to put to a good use.

The British public has ever shown a thirst for knowledge where its favourites are concerned, and is always eager to know everything about them that will lead to a better understanding of their characteristics and their work. Therefore, many will be glad of a peep behind the veil which conceals that elusive thing—an operatic singer's personality—for the singer is placed in a curious position, and is valued as an artist according to the ease with which he steps out of his own individuality and assumes with his costumes and properties another self with different passions, likes, and dislikes.

Of course, all singers, even to the greatest artists among them, have their favourite rôles which appeal more particularly to their temperament, to their musical taste, or to their histrionic talent. It would only be natural, therefore, to suppose that in these parts the singer surpasses himself and becomes truly great because he is entirely sincere.

Through the courteous indulgence of many of our artists at Covent Garden in this and past years, who have consented to

reveal their predilections, the writer is enabled to gently lift a corner of the veil and to let the readers judge for themselves whether they agree with the choice. The singer was asked in each case to state the favourite rôle and the scene or act preferred in the same opera. The portraits are given in that character, and they have, moreover, been framed in a few bars of the chosen music.

The arrangement of the matter is purely accidental, and in no wise depends upon precedence or preference, but rather upon the rôles themselves, which fall naturally into groups.

Gounod's "Faust" as a favourite of so many years' standing opens the list. Here we have two *Marguerites*, Madame Marie Engle and Madame Suzanne Adams, both of whom confess to a decided preference for this part, and for that of Gounod's *Juliette*. It is a strange coincidence that there is also a certain similarity in the manner in which both *Marguerites* made their *début* under

very adverse circumstances, which might well have proved disastrous had not both young singers been plucky and resolute enough to compel success to attend them.

Madame Marie Engle was to make her first bow as *Juliette* at Chicago, introduced by Messrs. Abbey and Grau; two rehearsals with piano and two with orchestra had been stipulated for, but somehow or other she was deprived of them by circumstances over which it seemed nobody's business to have any control, and she was left to face the immense audience imperfectly



MADAME MARIE ENGLE AS MARGUERITE IN "FAUST."  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.



equipped. She was rewarded for her spirit and courage, however, by complete success, and since then the rôle has ever been dear to her. Madame Engle, in reply to my letter, says:—

DEAR MISS SCHLESINGER,—I send you a photograph as *Marguerite* in "Faust," for all my pictures as *Juliette* are gone. I prefer the garden scene, and believe me,

Very sincerely,

MARIE ENGLE.

May 4th, '99.  
Round the portrait will be noticed parts of the well-known ballad, "The King of Thule," the "Jewel Song," and of the lovely duet music, all from the garden scene.

Madame Suzanne Adams made her *début* as *Juliette* at the Grand Opera, Paris, securing a three years' engagement in consequence. The occasion of her first appearance as *Marguerite* was a memorable one. The management was in despair, for the five available *Marguerites* were all indisposed, and Suzanne Adams had never sung the part on the stage and had never even rehearsed it; in the afternoon she was begged to take the rôle. "If Madame X. will sing the first part I will come in after the garden scene," the young singer said. At six o'clock, however, Madame X. was too ill to appear at all, and Suzanne Adams saved the situation by bravely coming to the rescue. She had her reward, and won quite a triumph.

As the "Jewel Song" is Madame Adams's favourite in the opera, she appears framed in its familiar strains.

London, May 5th, '99.

DEAR MISS SCHLESINGER,—It is very difficult for me to say which rôle I prefer, as I find so much to interest me in all of them. I think perhaps I like *Marguerite* the best. My favourite composers are Gounod and Mozart.

Believe me, yours very truly,  
SUZANNE ADAMS STERN.

This *Marguerite* has made quite a romantic marriage, as the bridegroom, Mr. Leo Stern, related to me. Showing me the portrait of

a sweet girl of sixteen, "That's the girl I fell in love with," he said, with justifiable pride, and "I've been in love with her for ten years." The course of true love did not run smooth in this case, for Miss Adams's aunt set her face against the match, with the result that one fine day Mr. Stern made his way over to Paris and brought Miss Adams right away with him then and there, "in her plain little grey dress, just as she was, and without any luggage, and we were married by special license in Marylebone Church."

Three days later, on October 21st, 1898, the bride had to start alone for Chicago, where she made her American *début*, but Mr. Stern joined her after a while. Cruel fate separated them again, however, for on the very night of her first appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, the bridegroom, recalled by a cable, sailed back to fulfil engagements in England.

Pol Plançon writes that his favourite character is *Mephistopheles* in Gounod's "Faust," and as for the music, he chooses the whole of his part. As it cannot all be quoted, the two famous numbers "Dio del or" and the Serenade have been chosen for the frame.

On one occasion our *Mephistopheles* was

distinctly original, doing a deed which would make the hair of all past and present *Mephistos* bristle with horror. The attitude of this proverbially red gentleman towards fire and his interest in keeping it burning brightly are well known; and yet on one memorable occasion, whilst Plançon-*Mephistopheles*, trembling with excitement and delight at the thought of a new victim, was waiting outside *Faust's* study for his summons, the unexpected occurred.

"What a curious and familiar smell!" said *Mephisto* to himself. "Is *Dr. Faust* burning up all his dry old books?"



MADAME SUZANNE ADAMS AS MARGUERITE.

From a Photo. by A. Dupont, New York.





M. POL PLANÇON AS MEPHISTOPHELES IN "FAUST."  
From a Photo. by Benque, Paris.

Suddenly a flame shot through the study wall, and certain indispensable excrescences on his head were singed. *Mephisto* leapt back hurriedly a foot or two, "Avaunt! slave, would'st thou attack thy master? Help here, water, quick! or I shall lose my victim."

Plançon - *Mephistopheles* re-appeared in the twinkling of an eye with two buckets full of water, followed by a freman with the hose.

"Look out there, old chap! you needn't drench me!" called out Alvarez-Faust, in colloquial French.

"Bah! who minds a little water? We shall soon dry down below!"

For once the cravings of the audience for stage effects were more than satisfied, and the ominous shuffling of many feet already announced a retreat, when a pure, clear voice was heard: higher and higher it rose! It was Melba holding the frightened

audience under a spell. Thus was a panic avoided, thanks to the presence of mind of these three singers.\*

This is what had happened: the red light which always heralds the approach of *Mephistopheles* had been too generously expended, and the canvas representing the wall of *Faust's* study caught fire.

There is another character belonging to the domain of French opera, *Carmen*, the favourite rôle of Mlle. Zélie de Lussan, who thus replies to the questions:—

My favourite rôle—*Carmen*. My favourite scene in the same opera—"The death scene." My favourite recreation—"Listening to good music." My favourite composer—"I have none." My voice was trained by—"My mother." I made my début in—"America."

(Signed) ZÉLIE DE LUSSAN.

The musical frame, therefore, is derived from the scene where *Don José* comes upon *Carmen* as she is awaiting the issue of the bull-fight; he has just pleaded for her love and been spurned by her.

\*Covent Garden, June 7th, 1895.



Mlle. ZÉLIE DE LUSSAN AS CARMEN.  
Photo. by Falk, New York.





MADAME NORDICA AS BRÜNNHILDE.  
 From a Photo. by Dupont, New York.

The immense scope for dramatic study afforded by this impersonation greatly attracted our *Carmen*, and in order to be able to enter more fully into the part, she spent months in Seville, observing the sunny, dark beauties who work in the cigarette factories of the ancient Moorish city, and making mental notes of the mixture of coyness and wild, uncontrolled passion in their nature. The keynote of Mlle. de Lussan's conception of *Carmen* is that she was an alien among the unscrupulous gipsies, and revolted in her heart against their wantonness and fierce, untamed spirit, longing secretly for better things, but incapable by nature of thinking seriously.

There remains now a splendid array of Wagner's heroes and

heroines. First, Madame Nordica - Döme, as the warlike *Valkyrie*, a rôle which she confesses to be her favourite. On her shield-frame are many of her favourite motives from the "Nibelungen Ring," such as the shout of the *Valkyrie*, *Ho-jo-to-ho!* the motive in which she pleads so touchingly with the angered *Wotan* in "Die Walküre," her awakening by *Siegfried*, *Brünnhilde's* new motive as a mortal woman filled with love for *Siegfried*, and her last glorious song of exultation in the "Götterdämmerung."

Madame Nordica, by the way, is the possessor of the only dog that can boast of having been inside Bayreuth during a performance; he was smuggled in under a cloak



HERR ANDREAS DIPPEL AS LOHENGRIIN.  
 From a Photo. by Kuk, Vienna.



by the maid, but the music was too much for his feelings, and he raised up his voice in protest; for which he was speedily turned out. Madame Wagner's remarks on the occasion have not been recorded, but she must have been very irate.

Herr Andreas Dippel gives as his preferences *Siegfried* and *Lohengrin*; there-

audience wondered what she was doing. This is what had occurred: When *Sieglinde*, escorted by *Brünnhilde*, tried to make her regulation exit at the back of the wings, she found it completely blocked up with scenery, and it was the protecting *Valkyrie* who, seeing her dilemma, advised the alternative.

Miss Strong won her way to fame with this rôle, in which she also made her *début*; for when she had been a professional for three weeks only she already held in her hand a contract to sing the part at Bayreuth the same year.

Mr. David Bispham wrote as follows to explain his preferences:—

It is hard to tell you which is my favourite operatic character, but I am inclined to think that the first Wagner rôle in which I appeared, now five years ago [the letter is dated July 20th, 1897], namely, *Kurwenal* in "*Tristan and Isolde*," is perhaps one of the best and most sympathetic, and one which the public seems to admire. The scene in the last act in which the faithful *Kurwenal* is watching over his master's bed, after which he

fore he appears in the costume of the latter, surrounded by his favourite music from the first act of "*Siegfried*," including, of course, the "*Forging of Nothing*."

Miss Susan Strong shall speak for herself as to her preferences in part of her letter written in 1897, and they still retain their hold over her, she assures me, at the present day. This is what she writes:—

I must acknowledge, however, that with all due reverence and affection for the rôle of *Sieglinde*, I find it rather bold for me to choose it above so many others which are so dear to me.

On one occasion, when singing in this part, Miss Strong found herself in a fix, and she was observed, after she was supposed to have made her exit, to return to the stage, unmindful of *Wotan's* wrath, and ascend the rocky boulders at the back. The



MISS SUSAN STRONG AS SIEGLINDE.  
From a Photo.



MR. DAVID BISPHAM AS KURWENAL  
IN "*TRISTAN*."  
From a Photo, by Alfred Elli.





Mlle. OLITZKA AS BRANGÄNE IN "TRISTAN."  
From a Photo.

Mlle. Olitzka further confesses a great partiality for the characters of *Ortruda* in "Lohengrin," and *Amneris* in "Aida"; her favourite composers are Wagner, Beethoven, and Mozart, and her favourite recreations studying and walking or outdoor amusements of different kinds; she thus finds happiness in her work without neglecting her physical welfare.

Miss Meisslinger, who has been known at Covent Garden for the last five years, tells me that the impersonations which give her the greatest pleasure are *Ortruda* in "Lohengrin," *Fides* in "The Prophet," and *Adriano* in "Rienzi." She studied under Mme. Viardot Garcia in Paris, and made her *début* in Wiesbaden.

The next in our portrait gallery is *Parsifal*, as sung by Ernest van Dyck, and

fighters for and dies at the feet of *Tristan*, is perhaps one of the most moving situations in the whole work. It gives me much pleasure to inclose my photograph, as you request.

Very sincerely yours,  
DAVID BISPHAM.

What more natural than to turn from one faithful servant of the ill-fated lovers to the other, *Brangäne*? This is the favourite impersonation of Mlle. Olitzka, who is represented in her photograph holding the cup from which *Isolde* and *Tristan* have just drunk the love-potion, believing it to be the draught of death. The bars of music forming the frame are taken from the first act of the drama, as that is Mlle. Olitzka's favourite. This time last year this *Brangäne* was singing in St. Petersburg, with MM. Jean and Edouard de Reszke as *Tristan* and *King Marke*, before the Czar, who always appeared punctually before the overture and remained till the end of the opera in his box, which looks straight on to the stage and cannot be seen from the auditorium.



HERR VAN DYCK AS PARSIFAL.  
From a Photo. by Hofert, Berlin.





HERR ANTON VAN ROOY AS WOTAN.  
From a Photo, by Dupont,  
New York.

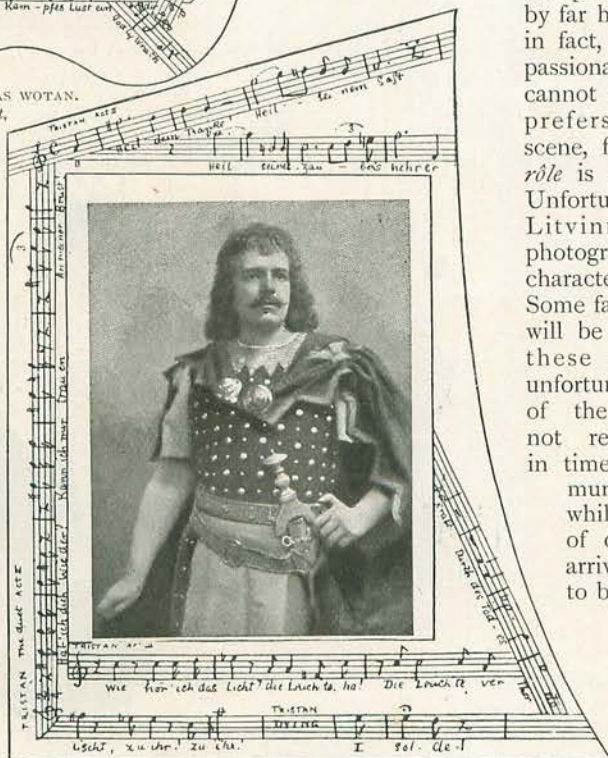
some of the music from the Good Friday spell, as his favourite, forms the frame. No man has been more persistently misspelt than Van Dyck; but he settled the point once and for all in court, where he was upon one occasion called into the witness-box during his residence in Vienna. "Do you spell your name *with* or *without* a 'c'?"

asked the magistrate, peering at him over his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Why, *with* a 'c,' to be sure," was the tenor's emphatic reply; "what would a tenor do at the opera without the famous 'C'?"

Herr Anton van Rooy gives as his preference the first rôle he sang at Bayreuth, and indeed on any stage—that of *Wotan*; and his portrait is surrounded by a few bars of the beautiful music he sings as he bids farewell to *Brinnhilde*, and kisses from her her godhood before leaving her on her fire-girt rock.

M. Jean de Reszke has sent a photograph of himself as *Tristan*, which is one of his favourite impersonations. The bars of music given are from the favourite "lovers' duet" in the second act; and also *Tristan's* last words in Act III., when, hearing *Isolde's* voice outside calling out, "*Tristan, Belovèd,*" he springs up to go to her, and dies in her arms with her name on his lips. Mlle. Felia Litvinne, who is Jean de Reszke's sister-in-law, tells me

the part of *Isolde* is by far her favourite; in fact, she loves it passionately, and she cannot say that she prefers any one scene, for the whole rôle is so complete. Unfortunately, Mlle. Litvinne has no photograph in the character at present. Some familiar figures will be missed from these pages, but, unfortunately, some of the artists did not reach London in time to be communicated with, while the photos. of others, again, arrived too late to be included.



From a Photo, by] M. JEAN DE RESZKE AS TRISTAN. [Dupont, New York.