

MOMENTS WITH MODERN MUSICIANS:

MADAME ALICE GOMEZ.

By F. KLICKMANN.



TO hope to do anything like justice to the personality of Madame Alice Gomez is well-nigh an impossibility when one has no other medium than that of printer's ink at one's disposal. It is easy to say that she has

wonderful eyes, the brightest and cheeriest disposition imaginable, a low musical voice that it is a joy to listen to, and a large-hearted womanly sympathy that makes for her friends wherever she goes. But this is only touching the surface of things. Her face is the face of a woman born in the region of romance.

"But you only say that because I am not quite like English people," she said in reply to something of the kind I remarked to her. "People here are so good to me because—because—well, I am a little different, you know. It interests them." Which was at any rate a modest way of accounting for her popularity!

"Tell me," I asked, "what is your exact nationality?"

"I have not an *exact* one," she said (and when she smiles she shows the prettiest of white teeth). "My father was a Spaniard—which accounts for the luminous dark

eyes—"my mother is Portuguese, one of my grandfathers was an Armenian, and one of my grandmothers was English. I was born in Calcutta, and lived all the first part of my life in India. Yet I was brought up according to English customs. We lived and always associated with the English in

Calcutta. So you see I am really English," and she summed herself up in a very conclusive manner. I endeavoured to look duly convinced.

But in reality she is a strange and fascinating mixture of the European and the Oriental. Her vivacity and wonderful intelligence are Western enough, yet a slight sing-song-musical rise and fall in her speaking voice carries one out to the East, and this is intensified when one looks at her dark complexion and black hair. It is quite true; she is "a little different" to us, and the difference is an enviable one.



From a photo by]

MADAME ALICE GOMEZ.

[Bassano.

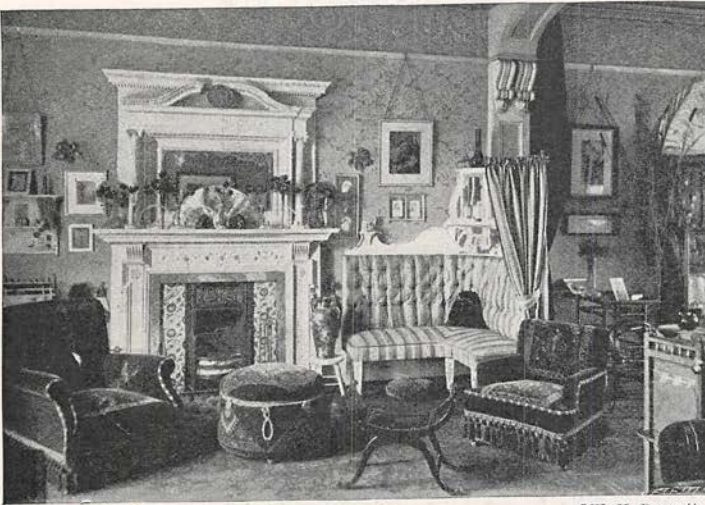
It seemed almost an incongruity to be sitting in a London drawing-room, revelling in a large fire and looking out from the windows upon snow and ice in the streets. But our talk soon wandered into warmer countries, and my hostess (who, since her marriage, is known to her friends as Mrs. Webb) told me something of her life in India.

"We were all very musical at home—my father and mother, and my brothers and sisters—and we all had a good musical training, though there was not the remotest idea of either of us entering the musical profession. We played various instruments: piano, violin, flute, and I played the organ. That was, and still is, my favourite instrument. One can get such a continuous grand body of sound from it! There is nothing to equal it, with the exception of an orchestra; and that appeals to me in precisely the same way. When I lived in Calcutta I had seven different organs at various churches on which I could practice. Latterly I have had to give up playing the organ. I have no time now. I studied in Calcutta under Mr. Webb, who was at that time the

a few are losing anything." And then we wandered into the by-paths of the "mannish" woman, which being should certainly have had no place in a musical interview.

"I cannot comprehend them at all," said Mrs. Webb. "But then how could I? I have a husband and two children, and you see —"

Yes, I quite understood. One could not fail to do so, with the sound of little feet running about in the nursery overhead and the bright face of the mother beside me, who said in a would-be scandalised tone, "But what a terrible noise they are making just now!" Yet I saw she enjoyed it as much as I did. So we talked about Dorothy and her small brother Denis; and Dorothy came down and chatted too, while I fell to secretly admiring her large dark eyes; and thus it was some time before we picked up the old thread of our conversation. At length I heard how Miss Alice Gomez came to England in the first instance. "It was eleven years ago; and my husband—but of course he wasn't my husband then, you know—had had to leave Calcutta and return to his home in England in consequence of the death of his father. He again pointed out to my mother how advantageous it would be for me to have some training in London,



From a photo by]

A CORNER IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

[W. H. Bennett.

organist of the cathedral. He urged my mother to let me go to England to continue my studies, but at first they would not hear of it. And as to my becoming a public singer, they were very much shocked at the mere suggestion of such a thing! You see it was very different in India then to what it is in England now; and what is more, my mother had not been accustomed to girls being allowed so much liberty in their actions as is the custom in this country.

"Which do I prefer? Oh, without a doubt I like the English ways. It is so much more pleasant to be free and unconventional, as girls are here. Perhaps there is a tendency just now for some to rush to the other extreme; but on the whole, I think most women are gaining much, and only

as he thought my voice was quite worth it."

"Perhaps he had other additional reasons for being reluctant to leave you behind in India?" I suggested.

"Oh, no," replied Mrs. Webb naively; "I am sure he had no other idea at that time. He was merely anxious that my voice should have every opportunity of developing to its full extent."

Be that as it may. It is safe to leave it. The ways of mankind are sometimes past finding out! The fact remains that in the end Mr. Webb prevailed, and Miss Gomez was ultimately brought to England. She studied here under Randegger, Shakespeare, and Trebelli, making her *début* at a "Patti" concert at Albert Hall. Later on she was married to Mr. Webb.

When I asked Mrs. Webb to tell me some of her professional experiences, she said—

“I think there is nothing at all to tell you about my career. It has been quite uneventful.”

“How do you find our climate suit you and your voice?”

“It is just right for me. I am always well here. In India I was never strong. The heat did not suit me. I went home eight years ago on a long visit; but I found the climate very trying indeed, and had to get away to the hills as soon as I could to try

come too, or run down for a day or so. But one has to leave the little ones. It cannot be helped, yet one regrets it.”

Mr. and Mrs. Webb spend as much time as they can every spring and summer at their pretty country-house at Torquay. But in the end these holidays are all too short—only a few weeks or even a few days snatched here and there when these busy people can just find a little time to breathe.

“But we enjoy it all the more for the hard work that comes before and after,” Mrs. Webb explained. “Have we many



From a photo by]

MADAME GOMEZ AND HER TWO CHILDREN.

[W. H. Bunnett.

and get cool. In England I sing nearly every night somewhere, and am often away travelling all about the country for weeks together. Last night I was singing in Lancashire. I came up by the night train in order to sing at St. James's Hall this afternoon. I have been singing night after night like this for eight years. People said I should not be able to stand it—that my health would give way. But I do not feel it at all too great a strain so far. I do not take very long holidays either. The only thing I do not like about the life is that I can see so little of my children. When I am on tour in the provinces my husband can

recreations? Oh, yes. Botany is perhaps our chiefest hobby—that and reading.”

The anonymous letters received by men and women of public celebrity are frequently too exaggerated and absurd in sentiment to be interesting. The following, which is one of many received by Mrs. Webb, has a ring of sincerity about it, however, and is a graceful tribute to the charm of her voice.

“To Madame Gomez.—May you live long to delight our hearts with your beautiful singing. And when it ceases here, may it only be that it may be resumed hereafter in the fuller and grander service of its Author, beyond the gates!”