

A TALK WITH MADAME BEATRICE LANGLEY.

BY CHARLES CATHCART.



A BITTER, north-easterly gale, accompanied by blinding sleet and snow, was sweeping over Primrose Hill as my dripping hansom pulled up with a jerk at Madame Beatrice Langley's comfortable house near Regent's Park; but before I had been many minutes seated near the blazing fire, sipping tea and listening to the sparkling conversation of my genial hostess, all recollection of the refrigerating process I had just experienced had faded from my mind and my spirits had risen considerably. Indeed, so completely did Madame Langley's witty comments upon all sorts and conditions of men and matters engross my attention, that fully half an hour must have passed before we came to actual business.

"It was in Dublin," my hostess then said, in answer to my opening question, "that I first played in public. My mother, at that time a well-known amateur singer, had promised to sing at the Antient Concert Rooms for the benefit of some charity. The song, I remember, was Braga's famous serenade, and I played the obbligato."

"Was that long ago?"

"Yes, for I was quite a child, barely nine years old; but I had, of course, been learning the violin for several years; indeed, I cannot remember the time when I did not possess a fiddle of some sort. In 1886 I became a pupil of Mr. Joseph Ludwig, but after I had studied with him for seven years I went to Professor Wilhelmj, then just returned to England."

"Did you remain with him long?"

"Two years. But before going to him I had made my *début*."

"Where did that take place?"

"At one of the Crystal Palace Saturday afternoon concerts. Then engagements began to come in, and the most important concerts at which I played were the London Symphony Concerts, the Queen's Hall Orchestral Concerts, and Madame Albani's London Concerts."

"But didn't you go on tour with Madame Albani?"

"Yes, but that was later. I toured twice with Madame Albani; indeed, it was Madame Albani who gave me my 'send off,' as they say in America. The first time I met her was one evening at dinner, before I had made my *début*, and after dinner I was asked to play. I played several solos, and next day Madame Albani asked me to go with her on tour."

"Was that tour made in England?"

"Yes. We went all through England, and everywhere the public seemed to like my playing. I enjoyed the tour immensely. Last year, as you may know, I was the violinist in Madame Albani's concerts in Canada,

and we had a perfectly delightful tour right across the continent, from Halifax to Vancouver and Victoria, and we also gave a few concerts in the United States. In all we gave thirty-three concerts. Madame Albani had also engaged Mr. Braxton-Smith and Mr. Lemprière Pringle, and in Canada we were joined by Miss Beverley Robinson, daughter of the late Lieut.-Governor of Ontario. From beginning to end the tour was a kind of triumphal march, for, of course, Madame



From a photo by

[Lafayette.]

MADAME BEATRICE LANGLEY.

Albani is immensely popular in Canada, as, for that matter, she is popular everywhere."

"I am told that you were married just before you sailed for Canada."

"Only three days before!" Madame Langley answered, with a look of amusement.

She is the wife of Mr. Basil Tozer, a prolific writer of newspaper articles and the author of several books on sport.

"I wonder how your husband liked your going on tour for the honeymoon," I continued; "he went with you, I suppose?"

"He did, and he rather enjoyed the absurdity of the situation. Afterwards, in Canada, strangers were constantly blundering by saying the wrong things to him. One day, for instance, in Montreal—or in Toronto, I forget which—an inquisitive stranger, with whom he was talking casually, inquired whether it was true that I had a husband 'knocking around' with me. Upon his answering that such was actually the case, and that he, my husband, knew the gentleman intimately, the stranger became quite confidential, and presently remarked in an undertone, 'Say, I guess you might introduce me to that husband right away,' and, of course, my husband did so. Then—when we were in Winnipeg, I think—I remember reading in a newspaper that 'yesterday Madame Albani and her husband were seen sleighing, accompanied by a small boy, probably their son.' That 'son' was *my husband!*"

"Does your husband look so young, then?"

"About ten years younger than he is, though he has travelled in every part of the world except Australia—by the way, we ought to be in Australia now."

"With Madame Albani?"

"Yes. Just before Christmas Madame Albani asked me to accompany her as violinist on her tour in Australia and South Africa, but, much as I should have loved the voyage and the tour, I could not see my way to leaving England for six whole months, especially as I had already accepted several engagements in England for this year."

"And how did America impress you?"

"Very favourably indeed," Madame Langley replied promptly; "and I think the Canadians themselves perfectly delightful. As for the audiences, well, you can't help liking the public when they seem to like you, and the larger the city, the more enthusiastic the audience—at least, such was my experience in Canada, and several artists who have toured there say they agree with

me. The biggest 'house' we had was in Winnipeg, where the Drill Hall is said to have seating accommodation for 5,000 persons. On the night of the concert it was packed. Some of the people came scores of miles in sleighs, others two hundred and two hundred and fifty miles by train, to be present at the concert. I shall never forget the sight of that Drill Hall, or the applause of that audience, as long as I live. It was perfectly splendid. Then, too, everybody was so hospitable. During the week or ten days we spent in Winnipeg we were *fêted* almost to extinction, and in such towns as Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Kingston, Vancouver and Victoria—everywhere, in short, where we stopped for a week or more—people hitherto perfect strangers to us seemed to vie with one another in entertaining the company. I must say that in this respect the Governors of the various provinces set the example—an excellent example, too, we thought it."

"So you prefer Canadians to your own countrymen and countrywomen?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that."

"But you prefer Canadian audiences?"

"No, I don't mean that, either. What I like about Canada, and about the States, too, is that an artist appearing there for the first time in reality runs entirely upon his or her own merits. For instance, an artist with a big name comes over from Europe, having been duly 'billed' in immense letters and boomed by the Press. At first the public flock to hear him, ready enough to approve and applaud; but if the artist with the big name fails to please, his song, or his playing, or his performance, or whatever his entertainment may be, falls quite flat, and very soon the towns hundreds of miles away, which he means to visit, hear that he is 'a frost'—for nearly all news goes by wire in America—so that when he arrives there, in spite of all his advance booming, he finds only empty houses awaiting him. For your American citizen is nothing if not practical, and, like our English tub-thumper, when he asks for his dollar's worth he 'means to get it'—not that he always does. Now take the case of a really clever and well-taught, but unknown, artist. He appears upon an American platform for the first time. He is received in silence. The audience hardly look at him. If they speak of him at all they merely criticise his appearance. He sings, or he plays. Gradually the audience become attentive. Then he seems slowly to hypnotise them. Their interest expands; their admira-

tion increases. Finally he stops; the spell is broken; he leaves the platform amid a storm of applause, only to be recalled again and again, and the next time he makes his appearance he is greeted with quite an ovation before he has sung a note or touched his instrument, as the case may be. Then glowing reports about him are flashed from city to city, so that from the first his success is assured all along the line. These remarks apply to women as well as to men artists, and the artist may have been raised in Germany and christened with a name of fifteen syllables, or he may be called Tom Jones, and have first seen light in Whitechapel, it makes not one whit of difference, provided he please his public."

"Did you study abroad at all, Madame Langley?"

"No, I studied entirely in London," she answered with a bright smile.

"That is something to be proud of in these days of foreign competition!"

"And you were not even born in Germany."

"No, I was born in Devonshire, in a secluded townlet called Chudleigh."

We continued our conversation, and I soon gathered that my hostess entertained the highest opinion of Madame Albani, not only, of course, as an artist, but as an individual. Incidentally, too, she let fall a remark that I have heard made before, a remark to the effect that Madame Albani

seems never to say an unkind word about anybody, but that she is, on the contrary, ever on the look-out for talent, and ready to help any young artist in whom she discovers the germs of genuine merit. Now, oddly enough, from what I am told about Madame Langley herself, and from what I saw of her during my brief visit, I should say that the selfsame remark might truly be applied to another lady.

Upon the subject of musical agents and musical managers Madame Beatrice Langley waxed eloquent. With but one exception, she personally has been fairly treated, though she prides herself upon never in her life having asked for an engagement either for a concert or for "at homes," at which latter she plays largely.

Madame Langley is an enthusiastic Wagnerian, and seldom misses an opportunity of being present at a

Wagner concert. Also she is interested in politics, and, besides being a lover of art, she is an omnivorous reader, and appears to be thoroughly posted in topics of the day and well abreast of current literature.

"Would you care to see my fiddle?" my fair hostess asked presently, as she refilled my cup. I replied that I should like, not merely to see it, but to hear it, whereupon she favoured me with Bach's famous "Aria," played most exquisitely on her favourite violin, a Maggini, which her father, Colonel



From a photo by]

MADAME LANGLEY PLAYING HER VIOLIN.

[Lafayette.

Langley, late of the Royal Artillery, gave her as a wedding present. This was the violin which she took to Canada. As Maggini died in the year 1630, the fiddle must be at least 267 years old; nevertheless, it is in perfect condition.

Madame Beatrice Langley is, I believe, the only woman violinist in London who has ever played in public the difficult A minor variations of Paganini. Her tone is quite wonderful, and, listening to her playing, one could almost imagine her Maggini was a 'cello. During her absence from the room for a few minutes, I glanced through her albums of Press notices, truly a marvellous collection of unanimously favourable criticisms, and presently I came across one in particular that I well remembered having read before. It was taken from the *Times* of January 2nd, 1897, where, under the heading "Music of the Year," Madame Beatrice Langley's name is coupled with that of Sarasate. According to the *Times*, Sarasate, Ysaye, and Madame Beatrice Langley were "among the most successful violinists who appeared during the year." Among the Canadian newspaper cuttings I noticed one that tempted me to ask Madame

Langley rather a personal question as she re-entered the room.

"Are you a Romanist?" I ventured to inquire.

"Why, yes," she answered, "I am a Catholic. I suppose that paragraph about my playing in the Catholic Cathedral of St. Boniface, in Winnipeg, made you ask that question. I played several times in church on Sundays while in Canada, and the Maggini sounded magnificent—at least, so I was told. Most of the churches in Canada are very good for sound, you see, and the atmosphere is so crisp and dry that it suits a fiddle to perfection. Do I ever teach the violin? Yes; and I find teaching very interesting, especially when pupils show particular talent and are industrious."

"One more question, Madame Langley, and I have done. I must put this question to you because it is one that everybody asks everybody else: Do you ride a bicycle?"

"I do," came the laughing reply; "at least, in the country. My husband will not let me ride in town."

I remarked that "Mr. Beatrice Langley" must be wise in his generation, and soon afterwards I took my leave.

