

MADAME FANNY MOODY AT HOME

A TALK WITH THE CORNISH NIGHTINGALE

THE nightingale does not sing in Cornwall. 'Of singing Birds,' wrote Carew in his *Survey*, 'they haue Lynnets, Goldfinches, Ruddockes, *Canarie* birds, Blacke-birds, Thrushes, and diuers others; but of Nightingals few, or none at all;' and he goes on to suggest that there may be 'some naturall antipathie betweene them and the soyle.' Or perhaps they are afraid of being caught and put into a pasty. But the best and most patriotic explanation has been given in these words—'They 'm jilles!'

At any rate the Duchy now boasts a nightingale of its own of whom it believes the bird may well be jealous: a songstress whose voice thrills all hearers, but speaks particularly to the hearts of her countrymen, possibly because her own heart feels most keenly when she sings to them. The favourite heroine of many operas, the popular prima donna of scores of platforms, Madame Fanny Moody is before all things a Cornishwoman, and the title she wears most proudly is that of the Cornish Nightingale.

It is only necessary to spend a short half-hour with this gifted woman, to learn how much she is wrapped up in the country of her birth. She is as Cornish to-day in tastes, in sympathies, in association, and in her love of the West Country as she was in her girlhood, which she spent at Redruth; and there can be no greater treat to her than to sit and talk of friends and kinsmen in the delectable Duchy, and to revive memories of bygone times when she was one of a happy musical family there, and when the voice which has since won for her such world-wide fame was often heard in the cause of local charity.

Madame Fanny Moody, or, as she now is, Mrs. Charles Manners, is not often to be found in London, although she and her husband have established themselves in a cozy house in the neighbourhood of Portman Square; for their many engagements take them all over the three kingdoms, and sometimes much further afield. Thus it was fortunate for me when I secured both husband and wife for a good long afternoon's talk and the promise that we should not be interrupted by any one; 'not even a prospective tenor or a future contralto,' I urge upon Mr. Manners, who is very much occupied with the organising of the Moody-Manners Opera Company. I have some little time to wait before my host and hostess join me, and I divide the interim between keeping a watchful eye on 'Paddy,' a favourite dog of Madame's, whom I know by repute to be sometimes averse to strangers, although I believe generally those of the sterner



Photo by

J. Moody, Redruth

you know, that is not an uncommon thing to say of a Cornish family, for every one is musical down there; even the work, and sing well too. Perhaps in one respect we were somewhat unique, for out of thirteen we have provided the musical world with two sopranos, two contraltos, and two professional musicians. My eldest sister is well known as a pianist and teacher of singing; whilst the youngest one, Hilda, is just now singing in the new piece which has replaced *The Geisha* at Daly's Theatre. "The Miniature Madame Moody," they call her in the provinces. My eldest brother has a good baritone voice, so we may justly claim to be a musical family.'

'And you have still further added to your connection with the profession by your marriage, madame?'

sex come in for his chief displeasure, and making a tour of the drawing-room, on the walls of which there are endless tokens of the appreciation the owners are held in. On the piano stands a full-length portrait of the late Sir Augustus Harris and near it one of the late Carl Rosa, the two impresarios to whom the world owes the introduction of the popular prima donna. Madame Marie Roze smiles on her sister artiste from a frame on a table near at hand. There are dozens of representations of Madame Moody and of Mr. Manners in their favourite parts, and framed testimonials from choral societies, companies, and associations. By this time my hostess has joined me, and we immediately plunge into conversation about the life and the successes of the 'Nightingale.'

'I believe you are a member of a large family, madame?'

'We were thirteen, and I think we were nearly all born musical; but then, girls in the mines sing at their dismal



Photo by

J. Moody, Redruth

‘Yes. My husband is, of course, well known in the operatic and concert worlds as Charles Manners. He is really a son of the late Colonel J. C. Mansergh, late Royal Horse Artillery, and J.P. for Cork and Tipperary. He was intended for the army, but fortunately he renounced the idea of soldiering for singing. He was, as I think you know, for many years principal bass in the Carl Rosa Opera Company and at the Royal Italian Opera.’

‘How soon did you begin your musical career?’

‘Well, I think in my cradle,’ is the laughing answer. ‘They say, you know, that I hummed tunes before I was able to speak. I was ten, I think, when I sang at local amateur concerts, and then when I was sixteen Mrs. Basset, of Tehidy, undertook my musical education. My father was not a wealthy man, and we were such a large family that it would have been impossible to devote much money to one of us, therefore I feel I owe everything to Mrs. Basset’s generosity. I went to London, and I had three years’ good training under that incomparable teacher, Madame Sainton Dolby. My teaching was to fit me for oratorio work, for up to the end of the time I was with Madame Dolby I had no idea of doing anything operatic. I had been brought up with somewhat strict Presbyterian notions, which rendered the idea of stage life rather distasteful than otherwise to me. One day, however, my great friend Lady



Photo by

Elliott and Fry

MADAME FANNY MOODY AS MARGUERITE

Morell Mackenzie wrote and told me that Carl Rosa wished to meet me. I went and I sang for him, with the result that he offered me a three years’ engagement; and he told me I might choose my own rôle for my first appearance. I thought I should like it to be Michaela in *Carmen*, and wrote and told him so, and then I was put out of conceit of this idea by friends who urged upon me the impossibility of making a successful *début* with another soprano on the stage. I wrote again and said that I would rather try Mignon. Then some other counsellor suggested Marguerite, and off went a third note to

Carl Rosa, who very wisely wrote and said, when I had "quite come to a decision, it would be time enough to arrange matters." Finally I made my *début* on the London stage as Michaela. Previous to this I had appeared in Liverpool as Arline in *The Bohemian Girl*. I had three years with the Carl Rosa Company, singing the principal parts in *Mignon*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *Faust*, *Maritana*, and many others; but I think then, as it has ever been, *Mignon* was my favourite part, and next to that I place *Marguerite*. I always look back with great pleasure to my Carl Rosa days; I played good parts, I had a good salary, and I made delightful friendships, and then last, but not least, I met my husband whilst a member of the company. By the way, it is a strange coincidence that we both joined the Carl Rosa Company on the same day.'

'What was the extent of your *répertoire* during the three years you toured with Carl Rosa?'

'I think it was a fairly comprehensive one. I learnt about fifty operas and about forty oratorios, and, of course, of fugitive songs I have a great number, including some purely Cornish ones such as "Shall Trelawney die?" Lady Trelawney gave me a copy of this just before we sailed for South Africa in the December of 1896, as she said that the thousands of Cornishmen in Johannesburg would love to hear their famous county song.'

'I want to hear all about your South African visit. It must have been a great pleasure to you.'

'You shall hear about it; but first I must tell you of earlier experiences. The first presentation I had was in 1887, when the Edinburgh students gave me an illuminated address, together with a poetical parody on the famous song in *The Bohemian Girl*—the 'Old Girl,' as we always call it. It ran this way:

'When other lips shall praises shower,
And every hand applauds,
Oh! sometimes think upon the flower
Once offered by the gods.'

'And when your fame in noonday blaze
Upon the world shall burst,
Remember those whose heartfelt praise
Foretold it from the first.'

The next year they gave me a lovely diamond bracelet. They are very enthusiastic, these students, and more than once they have taken the horses out of the carriage and dragged us back to our hôtel. One year Mr. Manners and I were both singing at the Students' Union in Edinburgh. The hall was simply crammed, and the late Professor Blackie came on to the platform and asked me to sing Scotch songs as encores, which of course I did, and the audience encored all the encores. At the end of the concert the Council of the University presented us with two huge bouquets, which long before we reached the hotel were reduced to mere stumps, as all the flowers were distributed as mementoes. Then I had to appear at my window in the hotel and sing "Auld Lang Syne," and as that failed to make them think of the lateness of the hour, and of the attractions of their own homes, I added "Home, sweet

Home," and even a speech, and to this they responded with "For She's a jolly good Fellow." This sort of thing went on in almost all parts of the country, for we were a newly married couple in those days, and the public seemed bent upon congratulating us wherever they possibly could. After we left the Carl Rosa Company we formed a concert party under Mr. Manners's management, with Signor Mascheroni as conductor. We gave costume recitals of opera, sometimes filling up the whole of the programme in this way; at others only half of it, the rest being reserved for ballads.'

'This must necessitate your travelling a great deal?'

'It certainly does, but I am never in such good voice as when singing five nights a week, month after month; and we shall have even more going about when we start the Moody-Manners Opera Company next September. By the way, I think I should tell you that last Christmas Day was the first we ever spent at home, that is since our marriage, and that was only owing to my being ill.'

'Where do you propose to make your first appearance as the Moody-Manners Company?'

'At Longton in Staffordshire, and then we take Manchester, Oldham, Wigan, and other Lancashire towns, and we hope to get down to Plymouth after Christmas. We shall be seventy in number.'

'I suppose you always look forward to the tours which take you down to the West of England?'

'Yes, indeed we do, and our Cornish tour is the only one we undertake on our own responsibility. We are always sure of success there. Everywhere we meet with the most enthusiastic receptions, and friends seem to crop up at every corner. I often say that in all my travels I never come across any place to equal dear old Cornwall. Each time I come down I see the same friendly faces, the same familiar spots, and I just long to be able to stay and sing for the pleasure of my friends.'

'And your husband, what does he say to all the ovations you receive there?'

'Oh, he is quite pleased that it should be so; indeed, he says it seems as if everyone claims acquaintance with me when in Redruth through my father, who, I think I told you, is a photographer there. My husband was stopped in the street by a man who said, "How do you do, Mr. Manners, and how is Madame Fanny?"'

"Do you know Madame Fanny?" replied my husband.

"Well, I did before you ever saw her."

"Did her father photograph you then?"

"Well, no, but I once went up in a balloon in a field over there, and her father was in that field when I went up."

'I understand that it was the Cornish residents who gave you such a reception on the Rand.'

'Yes, it was, for a great number of natives of Cornwall are living there, especially in Johannesburg. You must see the beautiful tiara they gave me, and this album of photographs of the principal donors that accompanied it.'

When we arrived at the Park station a perfect mob of people appeared to be awaiting us. They gave a hearty cheer when they saw me, and they also presented me with an illuminated address of welcome. Amongst the people there were many I had known in my Redruth days, or who had at least known some member of my family. Indeed, it seemed as though every Rand man who had hailed from the rocky moorland, every Jack from Camborne or Redruth, every fisherman from Mount's Bay, and every reefman who claims the Duchy as his native heath, made it his business to be on the platform that morning. After the presentation of the address and hearty congratulations from "one and all," Captain Tonkin, of the Cornish Association of South



Photo by Gordon & Smith, Cape Town
MADAME FANNY MOODY

Africa, announced that the Committee of Reception had arranged for a Cornish night at the Theatre Royal, when I was to sing, and said he hoped that they would roll up "one and all," and give Madame Moody a real Cornish welcome. Then we got into the carriage that was waiting for us, and the horses were unyoked and replaced by a score or so of Cornishmen, who dragged us to the Grand National Hotel, and this, mind you, in the noontide heat of a South African day.'

'I think you sang for your many Cornish admirers from the balcony of the hotel?'

'I did on the Saturday night, and long before the hour fixed for the impromptu concert every corner which commanded a view of the hotel was filled, and, to quote the words of a local paper, there was "an assemblage of enthusiastic but none too exuberant Cornishmen; for a few minutes this

congregation of robust Romeos waited for their Juliet to appear upon the balcony. It was a beautiful starry night, and the star of the evening was not long in presenting herself to their view." I sang "Home, sweet Home," and then they dispersed. We had a most successful week at the Theatre Royal, doing *Philemon and Baucis*, *Faust*, *Maritana*, and other operas, and finishing with a Cornish concert in the Masonic Hall. It was on this occasion that they gave me the beautiful tiara, and my husband a handsome diamond stud. I sang the good old Cornish ditty, "Tre, Pol, and Pen," and I joined Miss Balfour and my husband in "Crows in a Cornfield." The programme was indeed especially arranged for the evening, many of the songs we gave being

dear to the hearts of Cornishmen, and perhaps all the more welcome for the waste of waters which divided us from the land of their nativity. My husband sang "One and All," and the audience joined lustily in the chorus, and then he added the following verse :

"Old Cornwall can boast of her daughters, too,
They're happy and gay and free.
There may be as good in other lands,
But better there cannot be.
So in that land I found my bride,
And thus I think you'll see
I've proved my taste to sing with pride,
A Cornish girl for me."

'Do you ever feel nervous, Madame Moody?'

'I do, and sometimes I feel most so in the rôles I know best; but I think it is all a question of health, although mind you, I agree in the idea that no one who possesses the artistic temperament to even a certain degree can be quite free from such variations of it as feeling nervous or the reverse. In order to be quite successful, more especially on the operatic stage, a singer must have magnetism. I remember the first time I sang in Carl Rosa's Company, he asked me just before the performance began if I felt nervous, and on my saying no, for I really did not recognise my own sentiments at the time, he said he was sorry, as no great artist ever achieved that position without feeling so.'

'Do the people you are acting with affect your impersonation much?'

'Yes, I am sure they do, but I prefer acting with the merest strangers; if the part contains any love-making I should be too self-conscious if I had to do this with

my husband, and I believe that it is the music which enables one to do such parts with fervour. To me the man whom I address as my lover is nothing more or less than a cabbage. Of course, I know that actresses feel differently from singers on this point. I must tell you that I learnt my dramatic art from one of the best of teachers, Mrs. Brutone. Sometimes people ask me if I find it difficult to sing and dance at the same time; it is *more* than difficult, it almost renders me breathless.'



Photo by

Gordon & Smith, Cape Town

MR. CHARLES MANNERS

'As I am afraid I shall do if I keep you talking any longer.'

'Oh, there are a great many more things I should like to have told you, but I know that space is precious, and to my own cost I feel that time is flying.'

Regretfully I take leave of my host and hostess, whom I feel to be sterling artistes, delightful companions, and as great an ornament in their own home, as happy types of husband and wife, as they certainly are as hero and heroine on stage or platform.

LAURA ALEX. SMITH.



THE TIARA



Photo by

Gordon & Smith, Cape Town

MADAME FANNY MOODY