

Vocal Gems from

"MARTHA"

Presented by Harison Cook and his Company,
will form a portion of the evening's programme
from 2YA on January 11

FRIEDRICH FREIHERR von FLOTOW was born in Germany, but received his musical education in Paris. One of his biographers has said, "It was in Paris alone he could find stimulus for work. Life had always been made easy for him; he had never felt the icy touch of poverty. It was his pleasure to move in the gilded salons of the great, and to take his place in the fashionable world of Paris."

Such was the brilliant atmosphere which stimulated Flotow to write the sparkling melodies with which his opera, "Martha," abounds, and inspired him to introduce that charming old Irish melody, "The Last Rose of Summer," into his opera, just as Boieldieu introduced "Robin Adair" into "La Dame Blanche."

The story of "Martha" is simple. The action takes place near Richmond, in Surrey, England. Lady Henrietta (Martha), maid of honour to Queen Anne, is bored with life and, hearing the peasants on their way to the statute fair, persuades her cousin, Sir Tristan de Mickleford, and her maid, Nancy, to disguise themselves, with her, as peasants and go to the statute fair. She assumes the name of "Martha." At the fair she and Nancy accept and receive the earnest-fee from two young farmers, Plunkett and Lionel, and find themselves legally bound to serve them for twelve months. In spite of the efforts of Sir Tristan to save them, they are led away to the farm-house by the two farmers.

The "kitchen scene" opens with the two girls being brought into the kitchen by Lionel and Plunkett. They throw themselves down on chairs, saying that they are tired, and attempt to say "good night." Plunkett disillusioned them by telling them that there is work to be done before they go to bed, and soon has them at spinning-wheels while he shows them how to spin. At the end of this spinning quartet Nancy upsets her spinning-wheel and runs out of the room, followed by Plunkett.

Martha and Lionel are left alone, and the latter's sentimental nature causes him to fall in love with Lady Henrietta (Martha), and she sings the "Last Rose of Summer" for him, but spurns his love. They are interrupted by the return of Nancy, chased by Plunkett, who catches her but is immediately rewarded by a very substantial box on his ear. He is just about to lose his temper when the clock strikes midnight and the charming "Goodnight" quartet is sung. The girls take candles and go to their room and the men go out.

During the night Sir Tristan arrives and rescues the girls, and all escape through the window. They are unsuccessfully chased by the farmers and their servants. Lionel is almost heart-broken and later meets Lady Henrietta at a hunting party,

but she again dismisses him by telling her friends that he is mad.

Lionel loses his memory, but is tended by Plunkett, who has brought him up since his father's death and who has a ring which the father said should be sent to the Queen if ever Lionel was in distress. This ring is conveyed to the Queen's hands by Lady Henrietta, and Lionel proves to be Earl of Derby. He, however, will take no comfort, even from the hands of Lady Henrietta, until she devises the idea of repeating the fair in her private grounds. Lionel's wandering senses then return and he is made happy in the possession of his beloved "Martha."

* * * * *

This opera recalls to mind a story. Many years ago, when the Carl Rosa Opera Company produced "Martha," the tenor role (Lionel) was assigned to the English tenor, J. W. Turner. On the Carl Rosa contracts there is a clause which states, "All of the hair of the face must be shaven if required by the exigencies of the play represented." The period of the action of "Martha" requires that all the male characters shall be clean shaven. J. W. Turner possessed a heavy moustache, of which he was inordinately proud. What was to be done?

Carl Rosa insisted on the removal of the moustache. Turner lost his temper and said he would remove himself from the so-and-so company before he would remove his moustache. The outcome was that he was dismissed for breach of contract, and forthwith founded an opera company of his own, which ran successfully for many years. After the death of J. W. Turner the company was actually bought from his son by the Carl Rosa Opera Co., which had once dismissed the father. Such are the tricks of fate.

CAST

Lady Henrietta . . Kathleen Ferris
Nancy . . . Mrs. Wilfred Andrews
Lionel Richard Maunder
Plunkett Harison Cook

Programme

1. *Story of the opera, told by Harison Cook.*
2. *Duet, "Dearest Lady," sung by Lady Henrietta and Nancy.*
3. *Aria, "My Raptured Gaze," sung by Lionel.*
4. *The famous drinking song, "Tell Me, Good Friends," sung by Plunkett.*
5. *The Kitchen Scene, concluding with the "Goodnight" quartet.*

In this article Harison Cook tells something of the story of "Martha," an opera which, though comparatively obscure, contains many beautiful melodies. Several of these have been chosen for presentation over the air, and the reasons for the choice made are outlined. Mr. Cook also relates a curious little incident which occurred while he was with the famous Carl Rosa Opera Company.

THE selections which will be given from 2YA on Monday, January 11, have been chosen for two reasons:

First.—The bright duet from Act 1, sung by Lady Henrietta (Martha) and Nancy well shows the careless spirit of adventure possessed by the former and the more solid, frolicsome nature of the latter. The well-known solo, "My Raptured Gaze," sung by Lionel, depicts his sentimental nature in strong contrast to the bluff, "hail-fellow-well-met" character of Plunkett, so well shown in his "Drinking Song."

Second.—Act 2, known as "The Kitchen Scene," has (Concluded on page 10.)