

MRS. MARY DAVIES ON SINGING.

AN INTERVIEW. BY FREDERICK DOLMAN.



AT THE AGE OF 8.

(From a photograph by Hemans and Plumer, Coventry Street, W.)

A LONDONER by birth, Mrs. Mary Davies is once more a resident in the city of smoke and fog. On her marriage with Mr. Cadwaladr Davies, some years ago, the distinguished singer went to Bangor, where her husband was Registrar of the North Wales University College, still pursuing, however, her professional work with the aid of express trains and good health, well inured to the

fatigue of railway travel. Some time since Mr. Davies gave up his appointment to seek his fortunes at the Bar, and now at Campden Hill the singer has a London *ménage* of her own. On going to see her there for the first time, we began by talking of the change.

"On the whole, I find it a very pleasant one," Mrs. Davies says, somewhat to my surprise. "You see, the greater part of my life has been spent here, and I have a great love for London. Then, you see, Campden Hill is so healthy and breezy—we are one hundred and thirty feet above the sea-level, I believe."

And Mrs. Davies speaks as if she had heartily enjoyed the morning walk which—I imagine, from the dainty hat and well-fitting jacket she is wearing—she has just taken.

"One thing I miss—the pleasant little circle of friends we had at Bangor. At the college there was quite a little colony, so to speak, of congenial spirits. But one must think of one's work, of course; and as the greater part of my work has been in London, it was rather inconvenient to be living out of London. Then I have long had the desire to teach, and now I am able to gratify my desire."

"To teach? Do you mean pupils who intend to make singing their profession?"

"Most of my pupils have been amateurs; to teach others entails so much more responsibility—young singers have to face a competition daily growing keener, and success depends on so many things, besides the possession of a good voice; although that is, of course, the first essential. Take the capacity for working hard, for instance. I cannot possibly tell whether a girl has this capacity until I become acquainted with her personal character. A great

many aspirants come or write to me for advice; but in most cases I feel obliged to say 'Don't.' What a difficult task giving advice is; even this little carries with it so much responsibility."

"Of course, you impose some kind of a test on applicants for tuition?"

"Yes; it would be waste of time and money for a girl to take lessons from me if she had no elementary knowledge of music. But I don't like a pupil to have learned too much; she may have a good deal to unlearn. I have been rather amused by the pupils who have come for 'a few finishing lessons, although there is almost no end to what can be learned in music. It reminds me of the old-fashioned 'finishing' school."

"Do you think singing can be advantageously taught in classes?"

"Only to a limited extent. You see, there are so many things to be learned if one is to acquire any degree of excellence: the right way to breathe, first of all, which, when a singer is studying her music, must come as automatically as the striking of the keys to a pianist. But a good deal can be best learned in a class; and I am very glad that singing is now taught in all the London Board Schools. It is my opinion, you know, that every child should be taught to sing. Not that I believe every child is endowed with a fine voice, but because I believe the physical effects of singing to



MRS. MARY DAVIES AT THE AGE OF 18.

(From a photograph by G. Truckle, New Bond Street, W.)



MRS. MARY DAVIES' DRAWING-ROOM.

be invaluable. It not only develops the chest and strengthens the lungs—about that I can speak from my own personal experience—but it also involves the right use of the lungs in breathing, with the result that they are rendered much more secure from pulmonary diseases.

“A false method of teaching voice-production may ruin the general health as well as the voice, but on the other hand a rational system, has, I know, been of great physical benefit to several people with weak lungs who had no desire to become singers. Of course, we can learn to breathe rightly without learning to sing; but when it is associated with the cultivation of the voice, the task becomes much easier and more interesting.

“We have just had a piece of very good news,” exclaims Mrs. Davies after a pause, a sunny smile on her face—“I mean the Parliamentary grant for a Welsh University. Considering the troubles of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I suppose we have been very fortunate in getting a grant of three thousand pounds to start. But look at the money which the people of Wales have raised for educational purposes: quite a hundred thousand pounds—the people, mind you, not so much the upper classes. The County Councils, without exception, I believe, have given the money obtained from the liquor duties to education, and every county has adopted an intermediate education rate. As a result of its great enthusiasm in the matter, Wales has now, I believe, a splendid system of elementary, intermediate, and higher education.”

“Is there any relationship, think you, between this and the national love of music?”

“I don't know that I can clearly trace the relationship, although I believe music must nearly always produce intellectual aspirations. In many cases the village choirs have certainly had as much influence for good as the village schools. The great want in Wales has been good orchestral music; but that is being recognised, and in the last year or so quite a number of amateur orchestras have been formed. Of the universal love of the people for good music I had a remarkable instance one Christmas, when I sang at Aberdare. The festival lasted two days and four performances of the ‘Messiah’ were given; yet, although Aberdare is a small place, the hall—which probably held eight hundred people—was crowded at each performance. This festival has been held in the same way every year for more than twenty years.”

Of the singer's devotion to Wales the house has many suggestions. On the walls of her morning-room, in which we are sitting are several Welsh landscapes, painted by Welsh artists; in the drawing-room, to which she next conducts me, I find portraits of famous bards of the Eistedfoddau and pictures of their cottage homes. Mrs. Davies also brings out for my inspection a splendid old Welsh Bible, bearing date 1620.

“As you may suppose,” she says, “it is a kind of double pleasure for me to read in the Welsh language. I think I have caught some of my husband's enthusiasm for the language and literature of the Principality.

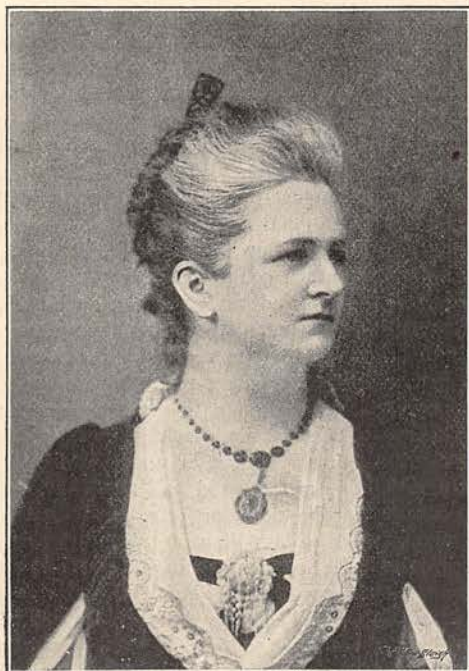
I am also glad to know that some Englishmen are also taking up the study; as a rule, I think you do the language an injustice in supposing that it is uncouth and unpronounceable. Those who study it, and especially those who use it for singing, are surprised to find how beautiful it is."

A fine painting of one of the Welsh mountains has a melancholy interest. It bears the name of Mr. Shrubsole, who made a success at the Academy about a dozen years ago with a picture called "A Crown of Fire." After years of striving, success came, but it came too late; he died just before the arrival of a letter from Messrs. Agnew, offering to purchase several of his pictures at good prices.

The singer has a great affection for the sister art—to be accounted for partly, no doubt, by the fact that her father is a sculptor, as were one or two other members of the family. In the drawing-room there is an excellent specimen of Mr. Davies's skill in a marble bust of his distinguished daughter. It is interesting to compare this with the portrait of Mary Davies which hangs over the fireplace in the dining-room. This was painted a few years ago by Madame Darmstetter, a sister of the husband of the authoress known to her readers as Mary F. Robinson. The young lady (Miss Cecile Hartog) who has written for Mrs. Davies two of her most recently successful songs, "The Year's at the Spring" and "Swinging," is, I learn, also a member of this same gifted family.

"You know Browning's 'The Year's at the Spring,' with the oft-quoted lines—

'God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world'?



PRESENT DAY.

(From a photograph by W. & D. Downer, Ebury Street, W.)



AGED 26.

(From a photograph by A. Bassano, Old Bond Street, W.)

I had my doubts as to whether the poem would make a good song, whether it would please a popular audience; but my doubts were soon set at rest. From the first it has been most successful."

"I suppose you have to consider well your audience in making a selection of songs for a concert?"

"As regards most audiences, yes, although I am bound to say that it is only really good music which the most popular audiences in the provinces will appreciate. I usually make a point of putting one classical song into a programme and one song of a lighter character. The worst of a song proving very successful is that it becomes very difficult to replace it by another. For some time past I have wished to sing one or two very remarkable Hungarian songs which an American friend has translated and set to music, but my repertoire is very full, and so far I have not had an opportunity. Then I have a great number of songs sent me by composers, and now and again there is one which I should like to take up. 'Twickenham Ferry' was sent to me in this way by Mr. Theo. Marzials, when it was quite unknown, and I am glad to think that I was able to obtain for a very pretty song the success it merited."

"I expect your engagements at the London Ballad Concerts have given you most pleasure, oratorios apart?"

"Well, it is a pleasure to sing a true ballad, and our English ballads are worthy of the attention of the best artists. Some very good work is done at the Ballad Concerts; Santley's singing of such a song as 'The Wreck of the Hesperus,' for instance, is almost a musical education in itself. As a matter of fact, however, some of the best work is done out of London. London naturally considers herself the hub of the universe in all things, but, considering their relative size, I think there is far more love of music

in some of the big provincial cities than in the metropolis. Take choral music, for instance. London has few choirs to compare with those which are to be found in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, and Liverpool or with the great choral societies of Wales. Another thing I have noticed is that if an oratorio is being given before one of these Northern audiences—say an audience largely composed of the miners and mill-hands of Lancashire—every third man or so is following it with a book. This circumstance must indicate considerable knowledge and love of music.”

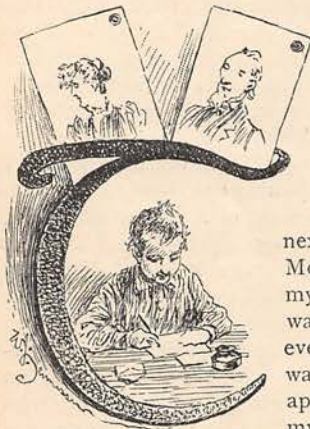
An autograph portrait of the late Professor Jowett on the over-mantel leads Mrs. Davies to make confession of her faith in the higher education of women, the brilliant scholar having been one of her friends.

“I am so pleased to think,” she exclaims, “that in our University for Wales women will be on a perfect equality with men. They will not only be able to take the same degrees, but if one should qualify herself for the position, a woman may become Chancellor. Just fancy, a woman Chancellor of a University! But when I was in America last year, I went over a big college

at Boston, where boys and girls were being taught in the same classes, the coloured boys or girls sitting side by side—and this, perhaps, even more remarkable—with the white.

“The Welsh Festival of the World’s Fair at Chicago, at which I sang in September last, was organised by a committee on which there were almost as many women as men, and so far as my observation went, they did their work admirably, with such a grasp of detail, such kindly tact, and such an utter absence of anything like ‘worry’ or ‘flurry.’ Speaking of the coloured school children, too, reminds me how much I was impressed by the coloured waiters at Chicago, who were certainly more polite than any of the servants in the hotels at which we stayed while in America. Some of these young men serve in the hotels during the summer, and with the savings on their wages maintain themselves at college during the winter. The circumstance seemed to me to throw a remarkable light on the rapid improvement the coloured race has made since its emancipation only thirty years ago.”

GETTING EVEN WITH UNCLE MOSE.



OMMY writes :—

“MY DEAR ROSIE,
—I arrived all safe Monday night, and there wasn’t nuff for supper. But I guess

I fixed that straight next morning. I told Uncle Mose square that I knew my Pa paid for me, and I wanted piles more of everything ; cause why, I was getting a Florida appetite already. I said my Pa sent me South

to get strong, and I couldn’t do that unless I stuffed. He saw there was no help for it, so he laughed, kind of sick, and said ‘Stuff away.’ Then I started in, and ate twice as much as I wanted, to make up for the bad supper, and to vex him.

“I went around with him this morning, and I tell you, Sis, he knocks spots off the prize miser. First we went to the lumber-yard. He wanted ten cents’ worth of shingles to patch a hole in the roof, and he nearly fought the man to give them for nothing. He didn’t get them. The yard-man said : ‘Not half a shingle without paying for it,’ and I saw him laughing fit to bust when Uncle Mose turned his back. Then we went to the store to buy a mouse-trap and a piece of bacon. There was a little bit of string in the bacon to hang it up, and Uncle Mose made the storekeeper cut off the string before he weighed the bacon. There was a cracker-man standing by, saying nothing, but

watching and grinning to himself. He had funny eyes that twinkled, and I saw him wink at the store-keeper. I felt right down ashamed to be seen with Uncle Mose ; but it was worse when it came to the mouse-trap. ‘Twenty cents is the price,’ said the storekeeper. ‘That’s too much,’ says Uncle Mose. (He says ‘That’s too much,’ every time.) ‘I could get it home for fifteen.’ ‘But you’re not home ; and there ain’t another store in this yer settlement, so you’re welcome to take it or leave it,’ said the store-keeper ; but he wasn’t mad, only looking at the cracker-man, and laughing all the time. So we came away without the mouse-trap ; but I guess Uncle Mose thought about it a good deal, for he says to me after dinner, ‘Take a walk up to the store, Tommy, and say I’ll give seventeen cents for the trap.’ But I said I was tired, and I tried to look pale, so he dursn’t send me out after that. I wouldn’t have gone for a hundred dollars. He tries a new dodge about the grub now. He keeps asking me to have some more every minute, expecting me to get ashamed ; but I don’t. He don’t know me much yet. I say ‘Yes’ every time, whether I want it or not. He’ll get tired of that soon. He ain’t as old as I thought he would be. Not more than thirty or forty. I didn’t think a real miser could be less than fifty, anyhow. And he ain’t ugly, only he looks mean in the mouth, and his nose has a sharpened point like the small side of a scissors. He don’t keep any help, and wants me to help him cook and wash the dishes. I would if he was poor, but he could hire help if he had a mind to ; so I won’t. I didn’t say so, but I broke a dish, and that did as well. He was afraid I might break more,