

## Illustrated Interviews.

LXV.—MISS ELLEN BEACH YAW, "THE CALIFORNIAN LARK."

By M. DINORBEN GRIFFITH.



NEAR the city of "The Home of the Queen of the Angels," as the Spaniards named Los Angeles, California, stands a quaint, roomy, one-storied cottage, its broad piazzas wreathed with vines and brilliant flowers. It is called "The Lark's Nest," and, true to its name, it is jealously hidden from view,

roses in bloom at the same time—miniature lakes, fern shaded, and still more flowers of every kind and colour.

In the distance, fields of Calla lilies, orange groves, and orchards of luscious fruits.

The air is heavy with sweetness. Thousands of humming-birds dart hither and thither, or poise their jewelled bodies for an instant on some favoured flower; the mocking-birds



From a Photo. by]

MISS ELLEN BEACH YAW.

[Steckel, Los Angeles.

and even from the too intrusive sun, amid stately palms and rare tropical trees. Its shady grounds are encircled with high hedges of vivid scarlet geraniums *vis-à-vis* with equally high hedges of white marguerites that gracefully bend their long necks to every wanton breeze; and adorned with a hundred and fifty different kinds of roses—one exquisite variety, the "Gold of Ophir," which stands near the cottage, has a record of 10,000

hold noisy *séances* in the trees, and bees and birds hum and sing all day long from the mere joy of living.

This eternal summer-house in the world's flower-garden is the home-nest of a singing-bird of rare quality that migrated to England last year, and is well known as the "Californian Lark," and the possessor of the highest soprano voice in the world.

Miss Yaw must have learnt singing from

the birds in her Californian home, for she sings as they do, without an apparent effort. She has a compass of nearly four octaves, her lower and medium notes having the rich quality of a mezzo-soprano, while the high, and very high, notes are sweet, pure, and clear as a bell.

"I never heard such a bird-like voice; it is almost beyond human comprehension," said one critic. And so it was. The young artist reached F sharp in *altissimo* with perfect ease, and down the two chromatic scales, each note being of faultless purity and given with a precision and crispness that was nothing short of marvellous.

Tall, fair, *svelte*, with a dainty, flower-like face, and endowed with one of woman's greatest charms—a low, sweet-speaking voice—that is the best description I can give of the Californian Soprano.

"Were you born in California?" I asked, one day.

"No; in New York State; but I was very young when we went to live at Los Angeles.

"At what age did I begin to sing? Oh, I think when I was ever such a wee mite! My mother was very musical, and was my first teacher. She often told me it was difficult to get me to practise, but that I would sit for hours at the piano improvising tunes to the nursery rhymes I knew by heart."

At the age of six little Ellen attended a singing-school, being one among



MISS YAW (AGE 17).

From a Photo. by Bishop Bros., Minneapolis.

about a hundred pupils of both sexes; they were taught in class. The master was struck with the voice of the little maiden, which for quality and clearness was easily distinguishable from the rest, and he told her to come up on the platform and sing the solos, and the others would join in the chorus. At this time she could not read, and could only remember the first verse, so the master had to prompt her.

After the lesson was over, she was asked if she would like to sing at a concert, and with

the permission of her parents she agreed to do so.

"Where did you make your first public appearance?"

"At Buffalo, New York. Perhaps you would like to know what I wore?" she asked, smilingly.

"I am sure the public would."

"Well, a little striped calico frock and a big print sun-bonnet, and my song was 'Away Down in Maine.' I was almost frightened at the noise the people made; they clapped me, and made me sing it again and again. After that I sang at many concerts.

"My mother still continued to teach me up to the age of fourteen; then I had lessons from an old Italian professor. When I was sixteen, I went to Boston to study, but only stayed there three months. I must explain," she added, "I am the youngest



MISS YAW.

From a Photo. by Marceau, Los Angeles.



IN OPERA.

From a Photo. by Morrison, Chicago.

of the family, and my father had lost all his money, and died when I was quite a child. So I was very poor, and could only afford to take quite a few lessons at a time. Then I had to sing so as to make enough money to pay for the next course, and so on.

"My next teacher, and one to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude, was Mme. Theodore Bjorksten, a Swede living in New York. She was very interested in me, and I took lessons with her off and on for two years."

The next important incident in Miss Yaw's life was a trip to Paris with Mme. Bjorksten, and she took advantage of her four months' stay there to have a few more lessons from Delle Sedie and the late M. Bax, after which she returned to California to a course of hard work. She

made up a concert party and toured through the States for two winters, each tour lasting six months.

She was received with the greatest enthusiasm everywhere. In Denver she received a perfect ovation. At a concert there she gave, as an encore, "My Old Kentucky Home," with such pathos, that after the first few bars many of the audience were in tears. This was followed by a gay French *chanson*. Her last song, the "Swiss Echo Song"—the call of the Swiss mountain-girl re-echoing from the heights—was rendered so faintly and so sweetly, that it recalled Du Maurier's description of Trilby's last song, when she used just "the cream of her voice."

"Have you met with any adventures or startling experiences?"

"On one occasion it was said I was fortunate enough to have saved hundreds of people from an awful death by a little presence of



AT HOME.

From a Photo. by J. A. Lorenz, Los Angeles.

mind. I was engaged to sing at a place in Texas; it was a cotton exhibition, and a series of concerts was given every evening.

"As I entered the huge hall I heard cries from the audience, and someone called 'Fire!' I rushed on the stage just as I was, in my cloak, and, holding out my hand to

paper, and as soon as I was comfortably settled, I took it up to read.

"I must say that I had somewhat of a shock when I read that 'Miss Ellen Beach Yaw, the Californian Lark, while singing in grand opera in New York, burst a blood-vessel and died on the stage,' but, best of all,



From a Photo. by]

MISS YAW, WITH HER DOG "KEATS."

[J. A. Lorenz, Los Angeles.

gain attention, I sang the first few bars of 'Lakme.' Almost at once the audience calmed down, and I sang it right through. I thought myself I never sang better—I felt inspired. There *was* actually a fire, but it was quickly extinguished, before the audience knew that it was a reality, and not a false alarm, and the concert was continued.

"It is not given to many to read their own obituary notices and the manner of their death," said Miss Yaw, "but that once happened to me. I was on tour with my company, and had to take a train from near Salt Lake City. We got into a sleeping-car; on one of the seats I saw a Chicago daily

it added that 'her last few notes were like those of a swan.' My mother," added Miss Yaw, "received hundreds of letters of condolence, but she knew that I was far enough away from New York, so was more shocked than alarmed."

"And your life and amusements at your home in Los Angeles?"

"Oh, very simple. We are five miles distant from the city of Los Angeles, almost at the foot of the Rockies.

"I am out of doors all day. I go home to rest; so I lie in my hammock or on the veranda, always guarded by my dear and beautiful dog friend, 'Keats.'

"Sometimes I go to the grove to pick oranges of our own growing—or to the orchard for fruit; but my favourite occupation is gathering and arranging flowers. I retire to rest at the primitive hour of nine, but am always up early—with the birds, in fact."

"The wheels of your domestic affairs must roll more smoothly with you than they do in England, to give you the leisure to rest."

"Oh, yes, they do! All our servants are Chinese and Japanese; they are very good, and easy to manage: splendid workers if—there is an 'if' here also—you let them have their own way. All our vegetables and fish are hawked by Chinese, and they are sometimes most amusing."

"What recreations or social pleasure do you indulge in?"

"Picnics chiefly, and afternoon informal calls; sometimes we make up parties and visit the North American Indians; their encampment is only a night's railway journey from our place. I greatly enjoy these trips, for they are a most interesting people."

Miss Yaw showed me some little snapshot photographs of groups of boys taken in her grounds. "These boys," she said, "used often to come and spend the day with me; they are from the 'Lark Ellen Home' for News Boys at Los Angeles."

"No, it was not founded by me. Do you see that gentleman at the back, holding up a little 'darkie'? That is the founder—General Otis, once a near neighbour of ours, now Commander of the American Forces at Manila."

"The Home was called after me, for I often gave my services as well as monetary contributions, and still do all I can towards its support. I am very much interested in

the scheme, for I think it is doing a great deal of good in keeping the boys from the streets. The Home provides board and lodging for a hundred boys—Americans and negroes—for the nominal sum of fourpence a day each.

"It is my ambition to one day be able to educate a few street boys and give them a chance in life. Many of them are such bright and intelligent little fellows."

"What about your second visit to Europe?"

"Well, I spent a summer on the Rhine, and then coached under Randegger for my next season's tour in America. I was not allowed to sing in England, as I was under a contract with an American manager."

"In the winter of 1897 I again visited Paris, and studied for opera under Geraudet. The director of the opera paid me a great compliment, comparing my voice to that of Christine Nilsson. I sang at one or two concerts in Paris, and received an offer to join an opera company at Nice."

"But the most important and, I think, happy moment of my

life was when I first appeared before a London audience. I am, I think, the only artiste who had made a name in America without having first appeared in London."

"What are your favourite songs?"

"I am very fond of Ambroise Thomas's version of Ophelia's Mad Scene, Alabieff's 'Russian Nightingale,' Auber's 'Laughing Song,' and, well—I have many favourites; and I love also all the old-fashioned songs; Scotch, Irish, and American negro melodies; they are so very plaintive and sweet."

"Are you satisfied with your reception here?"

"Yes, indeed; everyone has been so kind, and I have done so little. I have been



MISS YAW, GENERAL OTIS, AND BOYS OF THE LARK ELLEN HOME.  
From a Photograph.

recalled two and three times in nearly all the places I have sung this winter.

"You asked me what music I liked best! My choice you will think strange: the croaking of the frogs, with the chirping accompaniment of the cricket. I cannot say why I like it, but it certainly appeals to me more than anything else. My Danish hound, 'Keats,' shares this as well as several

winter engagements in England. I can be home in twelve days after leaving England.

"What route? Oh, I always prefer the Santa Fé Railway from Chicago; it is a perfect system, and the route is most picturesque."

Miss Yaw, in addition to being the possessor of a voice as lovely as it is rare, is also a great artist. What Nature gave



*From a Photo. by]*

IN THE GROUNDS AT HOME.

*[J. A. Lorenz, Los Angeles.*

other of my fancies, and together, on a moonlight evening at home, we stroll down a path leading to a vineyard at the foot of the mountains, on purpose to listen to the Frog Choir.

"I am going to spend a few months this summer at home, to rest and prepare for my

her, she has improved and perfected. Her personality is most winning, yet she is as simple, and I might say almost as diffident, off the stage as if she were a little maiden fresh from a convent. She looks upon her voice as a talent intrusted to her by which she may do good to others.