

MOMENTS WITH MODERN MUSICIANS:

MRS. MARY DAVIES AND MR. DOUGLAS POWELL.

By F. KLICKMANN.



FEW weeks ago I chanced to have a chat with the most artistic of all English ballad singers—Mrs. Mary Davies. When one looks at this popular vocalist it is a difficult matter to persuade oneself into believing

largely attribute my even health to the fact that I am a total abstainer. I consider it the greatest mistake to fancy that stimulants will brace up one's system for such arduous, trying work as concert singing. If even it does give one a temporary impetus (which is by no means a certainty) there is bound to be a reaction afterwards, and if this plan is continued one's temperament soon develops into a series of ups and downs, which is fatal to good, steady, reliable work. This is a question on which I feel most strongly, and as time goes on I am more and more con-

vinced that artistic natures as a whole should avoid all stimulants if they wish to keep their nerves strong and the brain at its clearest and brightest. Of course I do not mean to imply that every singer who takes intoxicants goes forthwith to the bad! But I am absolutely sure that those who keep clear of them have the best chance of standing the tear and strain of one of the most wearing of all professions. Some of our greatest singers are finding this out, and are dispensing with

that she has now been before the public for twenty years; yet such is the case. And there is another point to be added—no singer has fulfilled her engagements with greater regularity. The instances in which Mrs. Mary Davies has been compelled, through indisposition or any other reason, to disappoint the public, are extremely few and far between.

I asked her how she accounted for this, and she replied that she puts it down to the fact that she has very good health, and, what is more, she takes care of it.

"I also



From a photo by

MRS. MARY DAVIES.

[Russell.]

stimulants, which they once regarded as a necessity."

"Did you yourself find the life a trying one when you first became a professional singer?"

"I found it extremely hard work from the very beginning, but that is the experience of everyone who is in earnest and hopes to succeed. There is no way of becoming a singer without hard work. I think it is

a great pity that girls do not realise this more than they do. So many appear to think that a good voice is all that is necessary. Whereas I would impress upon everyone that good physical health is an essential, also the ability to study. Girls often write to one, and ask advice on the subject of entering the musical profession as a vocalist, yet very few have any idea of the hardships of the life upon which they are so anxious to embark.

"First of all I consider that five years should be devoted to close study, certainly not less than three years. And then much more attention should be paid to a wide, all-round education than is usually the case. It is folly to hope to become a great artist and yet to neglect to cultivate one's intellect on every side. It is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules as to what the student should or should not do in regard to public appearances, but it may be taken as a safe

guide that it is not wise to go in for both oratorio and operatic singing. If the voice be suited to operatic work, and if the singer has strength to stand the physical strain of all that opera entails, then by all means work with that one goal in view. But if the voice has decided limitations, and health is not of the most robust, then leave opera entirely alone and turn to other fields.

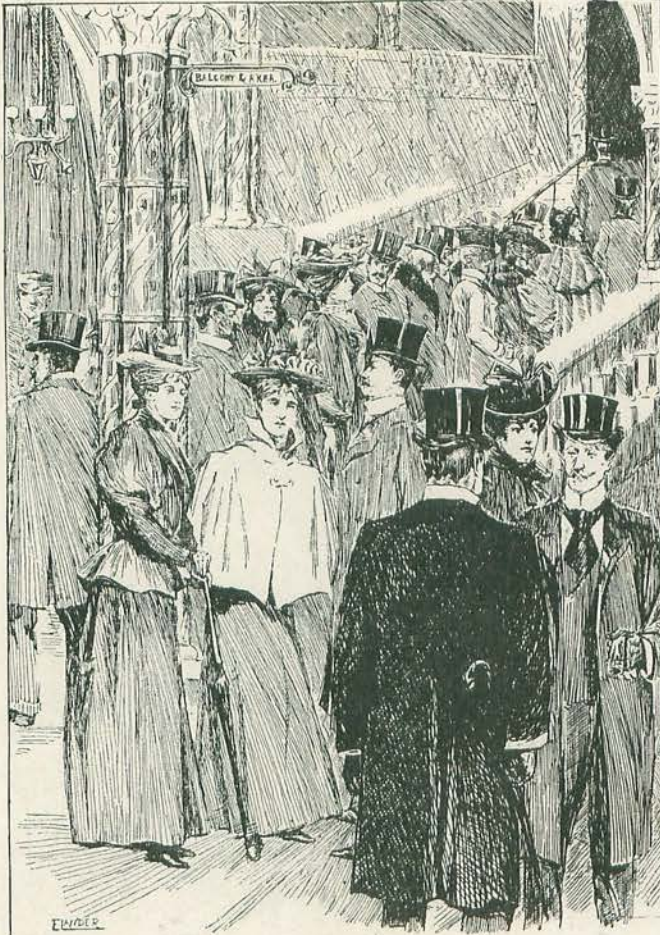
"It is also well to remember that a great

deal of a singer's success is sometimes gained by the direct personality imparted to the singing. It is not merely range of voice, or quality, or style, it is a something original that they infuse into their singing — individuality if you like; and sometimes a vocalist will achieve much by a distinct individuality."

"So far you have been speaking of professional singers. What is your opinion of singing as a part of the education of an amateur?"

"Most decidedly I

think singing should be taught, and taught thoroughly, in every school, if for no other reason it is so beneficial from a hygienic standpoint; it expands the lungs and improves the breathing. As time goes on this matter will receive more and more attention from the school authorities I believe. It will then be interesting to discover how many people have really good voices; I do not mean professional voices, but voices that



GOING TO THE BALLAD CONCERT AT ST. JAMES'S HALL.

will be most useful in local choral societies and in the home circle. It is strange, by the way, to notice how far in advance of Londoners they are in the northern counties, Yorkshire and Lancashire for instance, and in Wales, in the matter of singing. Their voices almost seem those of another race, they are so sturdy as well as musical."

Mrs. Mary Davies, though born in London, is of Welsh parentage, and takes the greatest interest in everything appertaining to Wales. No one is more popular at the Eisteddfodau and various Welsh festivals. The celebrated soprano has not confined her attention to ballad singing, though she has achieved more distinction than any other living singer in this field. She created the part of Margaret in the English version of Berlioz's "Faust," and, as it is well known, has appeared in oratorio and other music at all the principal London, and at the large provincial, festivals.

In 1888 Miss Mary Davies was married to Mr. W. Cadwaladr Davies, a barrister of the Inner Temple.

MR. DOUGLAS POWELL.

Perhaps there is no one among the younger men of to-day who gives promise of a more brilliant future than does Mr. Douglas Powell. He has hardly been two years before the public and yet he has sung many times at the Royal Choral Society concerts, to say nothing of concerts at Queen's Hall, St. James's Hall, and in the large provincial towns all over the country; in addition to which he has just returned from a most successful tour in Australia. Mr. Powell studied not only in England, but also in Frankfurt and Paris. He had intended to study under Mr. Welsh, but death prevented this, and he forthwith became a pupil of one of the cleverest voice trainers in England, Madame Bessie Cox (who, I might add, has since become Mrs. Douglas Powell). After his debut at Albert Hall in Berlioz's "Faust," he stepped at once into the front rank of singers. He says himself that he owes his fortunate start to the late Sir Joseph Barnby, who engaged him for three of the Royal Choral Society concerts in his first season. Since then Mr. Powell has shown himself equal to any emergency. On one night he was singing French and German songs, accompanied only by a lute, at one of Mr. Dolmetsch's concerts of ancient music; the next night he took the part of Lucifer in the "Golden Legend" at Albert Hall, which says much for the adaptability of his voice.

In a chat I recently had with him I asked him his opinion of music in the Antipodes, from which he had just returned.

"It is rather presumptuous," he replied, "to attempt to sum up the merits or demerits of music in Australia after one short visit, but so far as my own personal experience went I was surprised to find how far in advance the country was of what I had anticipated. For instance, a well-known writer has lately abused their music unmercifully, but I am sure very few towns in England could give such excellent performances of Dvorák's 'Spectre's Bride' as those I assisted at in Sydney and Adelaide."

"In which town did you find the audiences most enthusiastic?"

"It is difficult to say, each town gave us such a warm welcome. And you must remember that in Australia it is somewhat different to what it is in England. There each colony considers itself independent of the other. Here London takes the lead in all things; but in Australia, Sydney would consider itself decidedly slighted if it were to be insinuated that it is one whit behind Melbourne. At first sight this spirit of independence strikes one as strange, seeing that in England there is no sort of rivalry between the counties. But seeing that Australia is nearer the size of Europe, it is more the difference that exists between large countries. Each colony relies on its own individual judgment, and because one has been well received in Melbourne, Sydney is in no way influenced by the fact, or *vice versa*. Fortunately for us, however, we appeared to satisfy the sternest critics in both towns, and we were fêted on all sides and entertained most hospitably.

"It was strange, too, the questions one was asked. Several people inquired of me whether Madame Melba is really the greatest singer in the world! They have never heard her in her own land since she has become a professional singer. When she left Melbourne she was only an amateur."

"Which did you consider the most interesting part of the continent?"

"Without a doubt the gold-fields in the West pleased me most. Of course we did not go all over the continent. No one has ever done that yet. But of all the places I visited, including Albany, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, the wild life among the miners fascinated me beyond description."

And I did not doubt it for a moment. When once on the subject of life in the bush

it was next to impossible to get Mr. Powell back into the orthodox paths of music. If I interrupted his vivid descriptions of Australian scenery to inquire his opinion of Brahms's latest songs, he would reply with a clear insight and sound musical judgment, yet one could not fail to notice that it was also with a certain absence of mind, and it was only the work of a moment to transport one back to the far away island. Therefore, being interested in spite of myself in the subject he revelled in, I at length decided to "give him his head," and music for the time went to the four winds, I am afraid. I inquired how he came to have seen so much of the bush, seeing that musical celebrities do not usually spend their time in exploring unpopulated, waterless tracts of country when out on a concert tour.

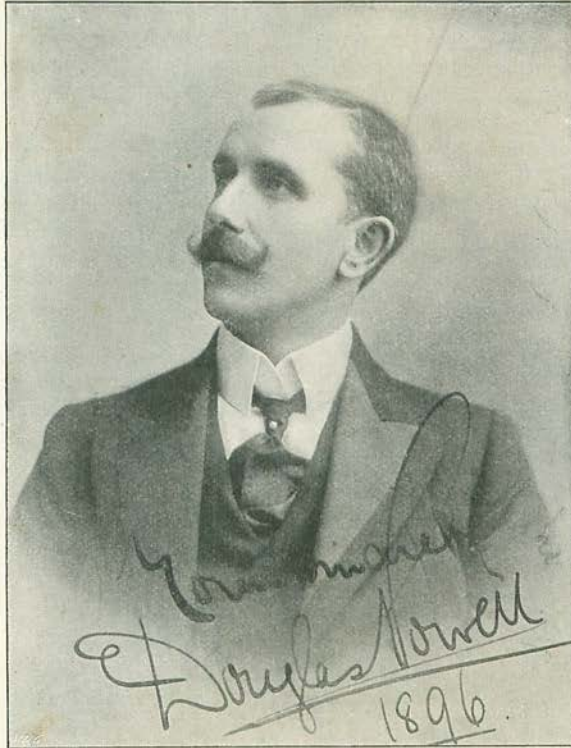
"It came about in this way. So soon as I had fulfilled my contract with my agent in Melbourne and the concerts were at an end, I decided to spend a holiday 'up country' somewhere, in order to see something of the less civilised side of the continent, and having introductions from home to several influential men in the gold-fields, I had no difficulty in gratifying my whim. I was fortunate in arriving there just as a new railway had been completed, from Coolgardie to Kalgoorlie, and a week of festivities celebrated the event. I started from Perth, and after a while I found we were rapidly saying good-bye to civilisation, as we understand it here in England. There were no such unnecessary extravagances as sleeping-cars, or other relics of an effete civilisation. We just camped out in the train and made the best of it. Progress would not have been so slow perhaps had it

not been that the guard would occasionally inform us that there was a train coming in the opposite direction (though how he knew this, seeing there were no sort of signals, I cannot tell), whereupon we would be shunted on to the nearest siding to wait there patiently till the other train passed on the single pair of metals. At other times too we had long pauses, though we knew not why. The guard would merely shake his head enigmatically, look preternaturally wise, and remark something heroic to the effect that he couldn't endanger the lives of his

passengers by going on until the line was clear in front. And again the problem would suggest itself: How did he know that it was not clear? We passengers, however, troubled ourselves but little about such delays. The stopping of the train was to us a signal to alight and explore the neighbouring woods or gather wild flowers. We knew perfectly well that in a quarter or half an hour, or whenever the engine-driver mustered sufficient courage to embark on another perilous run, they would blow a loud whistle and summon us back to

the train again, and that was all that concerned us.

"There is one great disadvantage in railway travelling in Australia which will have to be remedied sooner or later, I feel convinced, and that is the trouble the passenger is put to in having to leave one train, luggage and all, and re-establish himself in a fresh one on arriving at the frontier of a new colony. Each colony seems to have a separate railway gauge, making it impossible to run through trains. Imagine having to break a journey to Scotland in order to disembark at the Border and take a fresh train! However



From a photo by]

MR. DOUGLAS POWELL.

[Palk, Sydney.

when I went on the new railway just mentioned I was fortunate in having no change until I reached Kalgoorlie, where I took a camel as a means of further conveyance."

"What was the country like through which you passed?"

"It was unpopulated, slightly hilly, and covered with scrub, and gum trees. When you begin to journey inland the scenery in Australia does not greatly vary. As I dare say you know, there is a belt of land, many miles wide, which runs all round the coast, and which is well watered and consequently dotted with towns and villages. Beyond that is a vast expanse of sand where there are no rivers, no springs, no water at all to speak of; and in this enormous tract of country no animal life will live. The trees grow with their roots as much above ground as possible, in order to catch every drop of dew. The place is often carpeted with flowers, but they are generally a kind of dry everlasting flower. Of course, I am now speaking of the part of Australia which I visited, the Western side of the continent, but the same lack of water prevails all over the interior. When it does chance that water is found, it is not water as we know it. One merely sees a patch of sand, where, if one digs deep enough, a kind of thick brine is found, which by condensation is made drinkable."

"Have they attempted to bore Artesian wells?"

"Yes; but as it is found that they usually come to a granite bottom below the sand, further progress is slow and very difficult. And when they find water it is only surface water. As we travelled along in the train one could see low ranges of hills covered with scrub, but invariably with granite shoving itself out at the top of the peaks as it were, which seemed to point to the whole of the foundation of the district being granite."

"Water is the one big want of Western Australia, and the man who could at the moment discover a means of supply would make a bigger fortune than he who merely discovers gold. As it is, gold is everywhere, but little enough can be claimed, simply because there is no water. There is a Government scheme on hand at present, I believe, for carrying water inland from the coast rivers, but this will take some years to accomplish."

"Did you yourself suffer any inconvenience from the universal drought?"

"Yes and no. It took days of practice to

get accustomed to taking a bath in a quart or so of water; but for drinking purposes I did not find water in great request. I soon realised this when I was getting into the gold-fields, because at any apology for an inn, or wherever a notice could be put up, one read, 'All drinks a shilling each.' In a very thirsty country that soon adds up.

"When I finally reached Kalgoorlie, the end of the railway, I found a few planks on a raised bank by the roadside, which was the station. There was no name painted up, or any other indication as to what the place was called, but that is of course superfluous at a railway station. The whole place was *en fête*. I was housed in the most luxurious manner possible for those parts, that is to say, a room was actually provided for me in a hut. There were dinners, suppers, concerts, drives to the mines (every available horse and vehicle having been pressed into the service), dances—though these were necessarily rather one-sided affairs considering the scarcity of ladies. There were also athletic sports, and various races. The camel races were very amusing. Camels are much used in the gold-fields, they can stand hardships, and can travel across the sand in a way that would be impossible for horses. Afghans are also imported to look after them. When they want an animal to kneel, they call out 'Houshtá!' and it obeys. During one of the races, when all were tearing along furiously, there was one camel that was well in advance of the others and certain of winning easily. Suddenly someone in the crowd of spectators cried 'Houshtá!' and instantly the sensible creature went down on its knees, much to the annoyance of its rider and the amusement of the on-lookers, while the next man won the race."

"Did you sing at the concerts?"

"Yes, and I also endeavoured to tune the piano, of somewhat doubtful origin, that was to be used on those occasions, but was at least a tone and a half down in pitch. At one concert a miner came to me and asked if it were true that I was a Somersetshire man. I said yes, and replied that I concluded he was also, judging by his accent. He said he had come out to the gold-fields forty-six years before, and had never been home since; and then he immediately inquired most minutely about the town and people he had known. Afterwards I sang for his especial benefit at one of the concerts the Somersetshire ditty, 'Young Richard.'"

This little episode recalled Eugene Field's lines—

Oh, you that live in cities where the gran' piannies
 grow,
 An' primy donnies round up, it's little that you
 know
 Uv the hungerin' an' the yearmin' wich us miners an'
 the rest
 Feel for the songs we used to hear before we moved
 out West.

I next asked Mr. Powell whether he found miners very rough?

"Oh, dear no. Of course there is a great deal more gambling there than we are accustomed to here, but their whole existence is so much a life of chance that it comes to them as second nature. The gold-fields present a strange mixture of men from every station in life. For instance, I met Wallace Brownlow, who was singing here in 'Ivanhoe' not so long ago, and who made a decided mark in the Australian musical world. The last I saw of him was setting out on his camel to go over four hundred miles farther inland, where a rush was being

made through the news of a new find. He seemed remarkably happy and to enjoy the life immensely."

"Only one word more. Did you sing in any other country besides Australia on your tour?"

"Yes, we gave a concert at Colombo. The hall we sang in had no walls, only a roof, supported by arches, through which the air could blow freely, should there happen to be any. We did not notice any on the evening in question. It was rather hard work singing in the heat, but it was novel to us, and on the whole we enjoyed it. When the concert was over there was such a scramble for rickshaws. You should have seen Miss Thudichum, Miss Marian Mackenzie and all of us racing through the Cinnamon Gardens along the shore, with the heavy surf thundering on the shingle in a wonderful moonlight, each urging his native to run his hardest in order to be first at the hotel! It was rather different to creeping home from Albert Hall in a fog!"

