

DAME MELBA, THE QUEEN OF SONG, HAD GREAT CAREER; WAS OF SCOTTISH DESCENT

Somewhere a little over 70 years ago a small farmer from Forfarshire, Scotland, named David Mitchell, had a homestead known as Coombe Cottage, 70 miles from Melbourne, Australia. Here it was that Nellie Mitchell, afterwards to be known the world over as "Melba, the Queen of Song," was born and spent her early life. To jump for a moment from the beginning of Melba's story to the close of it—Melba used often to declare that she rejoiced in her warm friendship with Lord Mount Stephen because he reminded her so much of her father. They both began life penniless, she said, and attained positions of prominence. Melba used to tell this story of her father. She had returned to Australia, after one of her world tours "Well," said her father, "have you saved any money?" "Yes, a little," replied the prima donna daughter. "How much?" was the next question. "Perhaps \$100,000," was the answer. "Well, lass, you're richer than I am." And then said Melba, he winked at me and I winked at him. "You are quite right, lass," added the old man. "Never tell anybody how much you have got—not even me."

Melba was taken when a girl in her teens to the Queensland. Here she married a sugar planter named Armstrong, and it was here too that her only child, a son, was born. For more than one reason Melba evidently found life impossible in Queensland, and she soon returned to her father near Melbourne. Those are all the details of her married life that she ever vouchsafed to the public at large. At her old home she studied singing. Besides having the capacity for study she had an innate faith in her own ability. In 1886, with little but her passage money she came to London determined to learn more of her art. Sir Arthur Sullivan with rather a bored air, listened to her singing—and then suggested it was just possible she was fitted for a small part in The Mikado, which was shortly to be produced. It was only when she pushed on to Paris and sang to Madame Marchesi that Melba found a judge of sufficient discernment to truly appreciate her latest powers. Melba always attributed much of her success to Marchesi's enthusiastic support and devoted tuition.

Operatic Debut

Melba's operatic debut was made in Brussels, as Gilda in Rigoletto. Two years later, in 1888, she made her first appearance at Covent Garden. The famous Augustus Harris was then in charge of Covent Garden and Madame Albani was the reigning star. Melba's first appearance in London was so chilly as to deserve to be written



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the request was almost invariably for works by hitherto unknown composers. Of Scottish Descent

The life of Dame Nellie Melba was a series of paradoxes. Born from a pure-bred Angus stock, coming, that is, from one of the eastern counties of Scotland where voices are generally high-set and accents are unmelodious, she became the sweetest singer of her generation. Having a voice that held the world in thrall she had yet no "temperament." Having no "temperament" she was yet unable to live for more than a passing season with a husband who had been the sweetheart of her youth. Having no sentimental appeal from the stage, she was yet loved by all the world. Being a great artist she was yet an astute business woman. And so on do the paradoxes multiply.

Her voice was pure melody. She had a perfect technique; but she did not jingle it. Had her technique lacked such perfection she would have been unable to hide what seems to have been the fact of that she was cold.

Her marriage was an absolute failure. She referred to it as little and as reluctantly as ever Charles Dickens referred to his blacking factory. When little more than a girl she married an Irishman who took her to his sugar plantation in tropical Australia. There her piano became mildewed, her clothes were always damp, the floors of her house were frequently alive with snakes and the walls nearly always moving with spiders. She could not stay. So she left for her own home with her baby boy.

If there be any doubt of her ability to love deeply and to sacrifice herself for love one has only to read of how she worked for that little baby. She took him all over the world with her and she toiled for him wherever she went.

Jealous Rivals

It is not wonderful that people misconstrued her business ability. But it came from an astute father and it was largely developed in order to keep a helpless baby alive. Nor is it wonderful that she had her enemies. Success is not always popular. Though the world unthinkingly said of her that she was jealous of her "competitors," the green was generally in the other eyes.

She used to relate how this jealousy struck her very early, but she told the story with a relish that showed she had not been hurt overmuch. At her earliest concert, when she was only six and was called upon to sing "Shells of Ocean" at Richmond, Melbourne, her greatest friend, a little unaccompanied girl of her own age, was the only one of the audience who gave her no praise. All through the concert the little prig sat in a front seat with a poker face and at the end, when little Nellie was called upon for an encore—it was "Comin' Through the Rye"—by the way—still the poker face registered neither interest nor joy. The next day, after an unendurable silence on the part of the little girl, Nellie asked what she had thought of the singing and why had she not said one word of praise. "But, Nellie, I saw your garter," was the only explanation.

That was not the only story which Dame Melba told against herself. In after life she had another great friend who had a magic called "Melba." The friend came into a room full of guests one day and remarked, "Poor Melba has been terribly sick. It is because she has been eating so many mice," so the story was told in all seriousness that Mme. Melba ate mice in order to clarify her voice.

Loved Australia

She liked to tell, too, of other reasons that the world gave for her good singing. It was said that she sang sweetly because she had no roof to her mouth or because she ate three raw eggs before every act of La Boheme. Those who were jealous said that when she sang in church she always sang an octave higher than anyone else. According to some, she was a German Jewess with a father in Stuttgart. Sometimes she was a Roman Catholic, then again a non-Conformist, then a Christian Scientist or a Unitarian, or even a theosophist.

Perhaps she had herself to blame for the confusion which existed about her religion. She began her musical career by playing the organ in the Scots (Presbyterian) Church, Melbourne. Then she was a singer in the greatest Roman Catholic choir in the city.

Her affection for Australia was intense. At immense cost she built a cottage. (Coombe Cottage, which, for all her wanderings, was always home. Over the garage of the cottage are

words that she saw whenever she returned. "East, West, Home's Best." Australia will benefit by her affection. It had long been her intention to leave all her treasure in the cottage to her native land.

She had jewels from kings and jade from princes; she had onyx from emperors and pearls and diamonds from the Czar of Russia; she had treasures from all over the world and from the depths of the seven seas.

Derivation of Melba

To Melbourne, above all the rest of Australia, she gave her heart. She was born on the birthday of Melbourne and it was this fact that made her call herself Melba.

From that day in 1865, when she first enraptured Melbourne with her voice, that voice remained pure and melodious till she retired in 1926. She had the longest record of any singer ever known. She sang first in Montreal in 1913.

Long after she has gone people will delight in "Pêche Melba" and they will come across her name amongst flowers in the garden and fruits of the field.

"When the lute is broken
"Sweet tones are remembered not;
"When the lips have spoken
"Loved accents are soon forgot."

But there will be echoes of Melba as long as the English language has being.

HOW WEATHER TRADITION WAS STARTED

Chicago, Illinois—The superstition of the white man is that the groundhog peeps without his burrow, looking for his shadow.

The Indian has a different belief. Among the extinct Pottowatomies there was a legend that the groundhog or woodchuck, quitted his winter's hibernation to search for the mother fox. And here's why:

Wandering homeless about the woods one day, the little woodchuck espied mother fox and her young, all comfortable in a hollow log.

It was in the leaf-falling moon. The wind was crisp and cool—tingling even the lean wolves slinking through the timber. The sun was on the southland trail. The woodchuck knew the north wind would soon come.

"May I share your warm log?" he asked mother fox.

"You can have our home," she said. "My children want to wander and make camp as they go."

The woodchuck worked for days to make his home snug. He gnashed bark and pussy-willows to wall up his home.

The north wind came, the little woodchuck went to sleep. After many days he woke. It was cold. He was hungry—but was afraid to leave his burrow.

By licking his fingers, the woodchuck partly assuaged his hunger. Day by day he counted his moons on his fingers.

The moon of great cold passed; then the moon of long nights, the new year moon and—at last—the moon of lengthening days.

The woodchuck could stay in his burrow no longer. He was almost starved. Cautiously he gnawed away his door and poked his snout without. He shivered as he leapt upon the snow. The sun shone—the north wind still howled.

For an instant he hesitated. Then he ran.

And the wise old Pottowatomies said he ran not away from his shadow—but to find the mother fox, to learn where she got her warm fur coat.

while to bother about debunking the debunkers of history and historical personalities. The public's attitude toward them is like Little Boepp's complacent disregard of her lost sheep.

It is said the federal government could discharge 25 per cent of its employees and not miss them. That may be all right, but promising politicians certainly would miss them.

Some folks err because they think all poor folks are shiftless. Some of us poor folks err by thinking that all rich folks are stingy.

The beauty parlors all seem to be pretty much the same thing.

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