Agnes G. Murphy

Melba: A Biography

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MELBA

CHAPTER I

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Melba's father and mother were both of Scottish birth and descent, and came from Forfarshire: David Mitchell, simple and strong, upright and resolute; and his wife, Isabella Ann Dow, gentle and sensitive, but full of courage and cheerful philosophy. Given favourable conditions, they would both have been persons of account in any community. Mr. Mitchell has in turn directed his energies to building, contracting, squatting, and wine-growing, and in all he has reaped a liberal harvest of success.

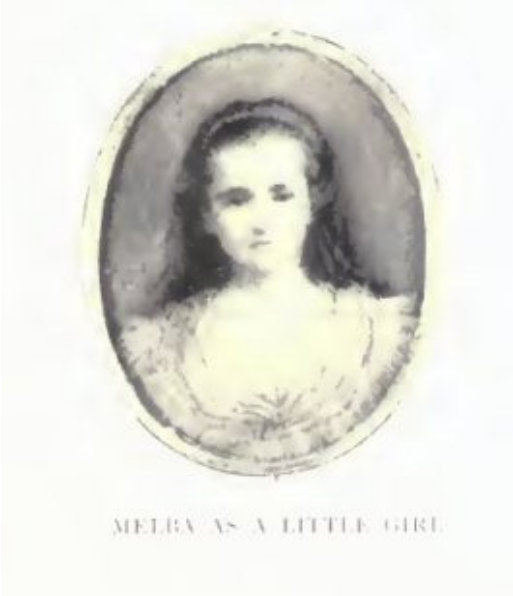
On two of his properties he recently discovered a soil suitable for the manufacture of a particular kind of cement, with which he claims that entirely fireproof buildings, including staircases and ceilings, can be constructed speedily and cheaply without the temporary iron mould by which Edison aims at popularizing cement-made houses. It is significant that his eighty years present no barrier to his cheery embarkation on this new enterprise.

Both parents were sincerely fond of music; the mother, a woman of artistic temperament and more than average culture, being an amateur of considerable accomplishment. She also used her brush effectively in the creation of pictures both on canvas and china, and played the piano, harp, and organ uncommonly well. Mr. Mitchell, too, had musical talent, but not in so full a degree as his wife, although he made good use of a bass voice of beautiful timbre, and played the violin with some skill. Two of Mrs. Mitchell's sisters possessed voices of rare beauty and a measure of musical knowledge wholly exceptional in amateurs. They were regular visitors at

Doonside, Richmond, Melbourne, where Helen Porter Mitchell —the Melba of to-day—was born, the third child of her parents. From her infancy she was thus constantly accustomed to hear music, and her earliest recollection is of crawling under the grand-piano when about four years of age to listen in wonder and delight to her mother's playing. In this retirement she would rest perfectly content, so long as her mother remained at the pianoforte.

The father took the greatest pleasure in encouraging his little daughter's love of music, and she has often since told how, "when I was quite a baby, it was my great joy to sit on my father's knee on Sunday afternoons when he used to amuse himself at the harmonium. He would blow the bellows and sing a bass accompaniment to the hymn which I picked out on the keyboard with one finger."

When six years of age, she appeared at a school concert organized by her aunts in Richmond, Melbourne. At this entertainment she sang "Shells of Ocean" with such effect that the audience asked for an encore, and the child, on her reappearance, created a still better impression by her singing of "Comin' thro' the Rye," in which her grandmother had taught her the Scottish accent. The appplause of that delighted company was her first taste of pubhc enthusiasm, and her joy was without bounds. On returning home it was with difficulty she could be induced to sleep, and next morning she was up with the lark in order to talk over the wonderful concert.



MELBA AS A LITTLE GIRL

At the earliest opportunity she hurried to her favourite playmate, who lived in the same street, and breathlessly waited for some reference to the entertainment of the evening before; but the little comrade was adamant and ignored the whole subject. After many indirect attempts to introduce it, Nellie at length found herself unable to wait longer, and exclaimed excitedly: "But the concert, the concert! I sang last night, and was encored"; and she looked with eagerness in the face of her friend, who answered witheringly: "Yes; and, Nellie Mitchell, I saw your garter." Miss Mitchell had been particularly pleased with her neat attire, and this unexpected shaft, coming in place of the looked-for compliment, in an instant blotted out the memory of the intoxicating encore, and drew the little singer from the seventh heaven of her brief delight to the limbo of unkind disillusion.

Another story tells how, at the age of eight or nine, she crept downstairs one night long after all the family had retired to rest, and, taking her place at the piano, began Beethoven's

"Moonlight Sonata." Before she had proceeded very far, the whole house was aroused by the unusual disturbance; but when her father came to the door and gazed on the little white-robed figure, looking for once the very picture of docility, he had not the heart to chide her, but smiled indulgently as he carried her back to bed. At this time she remembers that her favourite songs were "Comin' thro' the Rye" and "Nellie Bly," the latter winning her favour because the heroine was a namesake.

The playthings of the average little girl had no attraction for Nellie. Dolls were entirely outside her interest; but for a wooden rocking-horse equipped with tail and mane of orthodox hair she developed quite an inordinate affection, and for several years regarded the donor, Mr. Newbiggin, who had long been confidential manager to her father, as a being more wonderful than any Santa Claus.

The little girl's early education was directed by two aunts, sisters of Mrs. Mitchell, and their old pupil is never tired of recalling instances of their competence and their patient kindness to her. "My Aunt Lizzie," she writes, "possessed a soprano voice of extraordinary beauty. I can clearly remember the perfect control with which she used it, and the facility of her execution, even in the highest pianissimo passages. I feel sure she would have made a brilliant success had she become a public singer."

Love of mischief led Nellie Mitchell into all sorts of misdemeanours, and as a measure of repression she was sent as a boarder to Leigh House—a school in Bridge Road, Richmond, standing on high ground—from the upstairs windows of which she could see the tower of Doonside. This possibility intensified her grief over the new order of things,

and for hours at a time she would stand at the window screaming piteously to be taken home. When Mr. Mitchell heard of this, he made a point of passing Leigh House whenever he went in or out of the city, so that she might be consoled by seeing him. But the sight of her father only made matters worse, and when she espied him in a buggy or on top of a bus she cried so much more that the boarding-school was set down as a failure, and she was taken home.

DOONSIDE, RICHMOND, MELBOURNE

When old enough, Nellie was sent to the Presbyterian Ladies' College in East Melbourne, a scholastic establishment of the very highest standing, where she took fair advantage of the admirable opportunities offered, without ever becoming in any sense a brilliant pupil, except in the department of music, where she was consistently and conspicuously successful.

Wilful, daring, uncomprisingly frank, and possessed of inexhaustible energy and irrepressible spirits, she was constantly in trouble—the ringleader in every turmoil, and the unabashed confessor of her foibles. Together with the ordinary subjects of a girl's education she took up singing, and received a certain number of lessons from Madame Christian, a well-known professional singer, who has since become a nun, and now successfully directs the music-school at St. Vincent's Convent, Sydney; but these were not a matter of serious attention then, and her best and fullest thought was given to the pianoforte and organ, which at a very early age she could play extremely well.

In early girlhood she became an expert in the art of whistling, an accomplishment which in later years she often put to practical use when studying operatic rules; and as this attainment was supposed to be peculiarly shocking to the sentiments of the Presbyterian college teachers, it was in a corresponding degree particularly admired by the pupils, who were never tired of hearing her whistle the popular airs of the day. By way of variety, her young comrades would often cluster round her, and say: "And now, Nellie, make that funny noise in your throat"—this being the earliest appreciation of the natural trill which was subsequently to serve her so admirably in her professional career. The opinion has been hazarded that her juvenile feats as a whistler may have helped in the development of the unrivalled breath-control for which she is now famous.

The whole of her school-days were spent in the city of Melbourne, but her holidays were divided between the different country places belonging to her father. She was particularly well known at Lilydale, a pretty township which,

owing to its close proximity to Melbourne—from which it is only distant about twenty-four miles—was a regular visiting-place of the family. Here Nellie Mitchell rode, drove, fished, and romped generally, with an amount of hilarious zest that bewildered the staid and delighted the joyous of the neighbourhood. No pranlv was too wild, no mischief too disconcerting, for her. Returning from an extended holiday in South Gippsland on one occasion, she was so delighted at getting back to the city, that on the final stage of the journey—a coach-drive from Hastings to Melbourne—she allowed neither man, woman, nor child to pass without calling out some joyous and mirth-provoking greeting.

"An incident of my childhood that has often been told against me," said Melba not long ago, "relates to one of my visits to a country place of my father's when I was about twelve years of age. I was furious when I found there was no piano in the house, and refused to be comforted when my mother drew my attention to a dislocated harmonium and a concertina, which it was hoped might satisfy me. In teaching myself the concertina I eventually wiled away many an hour, but when that was finished I was again most dissatisfied because there wasn't a piano. In these outlying Bush districts it was then the custom—and, indeed, is to-day—for a clergyman or lay-preacher to come along on Sundays, and at the principal homesteads hold service for the family, the servants, and the station hands, who at shearing-time often make quite a large congregation.

"On one of these occasions we were visited by a worthy man who preached a very long and, as we children thought, a very dull sermon. When he finished he suggested that we should sing a hymn, and my mother asked me to play it on the

harmonium; but I was so wearied by the discourse, and so full of my grievance in regard to the piano, that my feelings got the better of me, and instead of the hymn I played with great vigour 'You should see me dance the Polka,' to the consternation, even horror, of my father and mother, who sent me to bed for the remainder of the day."

Bubbling over with health and spirits, Nellie Mitchell's childhood was one continuous term of joyous revolt against any kind of restraint, and in consigning her to a day's confinement within the narrow walls of her bedroom her parents had selected the most telling of all reasonable punishments. She hated to be still herself, and she hated to see other people still, particularly if they, as a consequence, exacted quietude from her. Her father and his brothers were fond of playing whist, and often sat for hours at the game, their keenness in the contest making them anxious for the utmost quiet in the room where they played. During one of these long-drawn-out seances Nellie's patience became quite exhausted. Procuring a pair of bellows, she silently stole under the table, and, placing her weapon of attack in position, blew a mighty blast up the leg of her uncle's trousers—a proceeding which speedily demoralized the whist-party.

"When I was about twelve or thirteen years of age," says Melba, "I had what then seemed to me a real adventure. I was making good progress with my music, and received permission to practise occasionally on the grand organ of the Scots Church, where my people worshipped, and where my father now and then sang in the choir. Late one afternoon I stopped playing, and sat at the keyboard thinking. I remained there for some considerable time, and when at last I made my way to the door, I found I was locked in. The verger, believing that I

had gone, had bolted and barred the doors. In a moment I worked myself into a perfect agony of mind. The church was already dark, and the pulpit and organ, in their grey dust-sheets, looked like some dreadful spectres. A night alone in such a place, I thought, would drive me mad. The frenzy was already asserting itself, when I heard a key in the door. The verger had returned for something he had forgotten, and I was released from my terrifying solitude."

On another occasion—a blazing midsummer day it was, when the pleasures of sea-bathing seemed particularly alluring—Nellie and a little girl friend set out for the old Stubbs Baths, which at that time were approached on one side across a miry swamp bridged by a long narrow plank. The great probability of mishap for anyone who did not step with care had no deterrent effect on Nellie, who at once began to run up and down the narrow swaying board at an alarming speed. The inevitable happened, and she overbalanced herself into the quagmire beneath, from which she afterwards emerged entirely covered with mud. In all her frolics she kept a close eye on the neatness of her person, and the unwelcome coat of mire filled her with impatience for its removal. Hurrying to the baths, she secured her ticket, and instantly plunged into the sea, without removing her clothes. Paddling about until the mud was washed from her garments, she then changed into the regulation bathing-dress, and played in the water until the sun had dried her ordinary attire, in which, through her resourcefulness, she was finally able to make a fairly presentable appearance on the return trip home.

It is only to be expected that old Melbourne playmates and friends should delight to recall memories of the many wild frolics into which Nellie Mitchell so gaily entered in these early

days, and it is told of her that on one occasion, during the temporary absence of the driver, she nimbly mounted the front seat of an omnibus, and drove the public conveyance down one of the principal streets of the city at a pace that sent the frightened pedestrians scurrying in all directions.

Early evidence of a leaning towards dramatic personation is given in a practical joke planned at the expense of her father. The nuns belonging to one of the Melbourne convents were engaged in a work of charity which necessitated a house-to-house canvass for subscriptions. Nellie knew of this, and at a suitable opportunity improvised the dress of a *religieuse*, and, with the assistance of the servants, got to the front door without being seen by any members of the family. She then rang, stated her mission, and begged an audience of Mr. Mitchell, who presented himself with some reluctance. With downcast eyes and gentle voice she pleaded the cause of the convent charity with such success that her father, who did not see quite clearly why he, a Presbyterian, should support a Catholic institution, at length gave her a sovereign. When he found out the trick played on him by his daughter, he was easily persuaded to let her retain the donation for herself.

Her early years were passed under the happiest conditions. Given good health, an attractive home, numerous holidays, full means for their complete enjoyment, and the tenderest parental care, she flourished in body and mind, and, despite—or perhaps because of—her hilarious escapades, became the darling of the family, whose devotion she amply returned in her own frank, unpretentious manner. For the adequate encouragement of her musical progress an organ was built into the drawing-room at Doonside, and she was given frequent opportunity to hear whatever notable musicians

visited Australia. Her criticism of the artists was often of so severe a character that her mother, as a wise measure of repression, occasionally left Nellie at home when taking the other children to these concerts. All the other members of the family invariably expressed the keenest delight over the performances, but her approval was not so easily won, and where she thought there was reason for adverse criticism she gave it unreservedly, to the especial discomfort of her mother, who feared that the precocious judgment of the child indicated a want of musical sympathy and appreciation. Madame Arabella Goddard was the first artist to leave an impression of unusual gifts on the mind of the young critic.

It was at this period that she conceived the idea of herself performing at a real concert in the drawing-room at Doonside, and she carried through all the preliminaries with perfect completeness. Her father, seeing in this entertainment a possible step towards the professional life which had already been suggested for his daughter, and which he both feared and opposed, sent round to all the family friends and begged them not to attend. His canvass among her prospective audience was very successful, for only two people presented themselves on the day fixed for the concert. She, however, neither stormed, nor wept, nor made a fuss of any kind. She just took her music and went through the arranged programme as formally, as cheerfully, and as carefully, as though her audience of two had been an overflowing house at London or Paris on a gala night.

On another occasion, while still in the amateur status, she organized a concert at Sorrento, Victoria, where she was holiday-making with her family; the object being to provide a new fence for the local cemetery, the dilapidated appearance

of which had appealed to her kind heart through her order-loving eye. She had used up all available funds on the expenses of preparation, and, when the bill-posting came to be done, had no money in hand to pay for that item. Unwilling to sacrifice valuable time and burden the concert with any unavoidable expenses, she at once resolved on a novel means of escape from the dilemma, and, armed with a brush and a pot of paste, she went out after sunset and did the bill-posting herself, making a particularly good show on the cemetery fence that was to be repaired by her efforts. At the concert she sang "The Angel at the Window" (Tours) and "Sing, Sweet Bird" (Ganz), receiving much applause from the audience, which completely filled the Mechanics' Institute. The newspaper accounts described the concert as quite above the ordinary amateur standard, and upwards of £20 was realized for the cemetery funds as the outcome of her good management.

It was in 1881, before Nellie's voice had ever been formally heard in public, that the death of her mother brought her the first experience of a real sorrow. So very deep was the impression created by this bereavement that she can even now recall with poignant realism every detail of that scene of sadness. The affection existing between mother and daughter was one of unusual tenderness, and on the first copy of a photograph of herself, taken in Paris at the time of her début, she wrote an inscription to the unforgotten dead: "To my dear mother and best friend."

CHAPTER II

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On December 22, 1882, at Brisbane, Queensland, took place the marriage of Charles Nesbitt Frederick Armstrong, youngest son of the late Sir Andrew Armstrong, Bart., of Gallen Priory, King's County, Ireland, to Helen Porter Mitchell, eldest daughter of David Mitchell, of Doonside, Richmond, Melbourne. Mr. Mitchell had welcomed the marriage of his daughter as the sure termination of her aspirations after a professional life, and in paying Signor Cecchi and her other teachers for the tuition received up to that date he felt a certain parental satisfaction that there would be no more disturbing music-lessons. She spent the whole of 1883 in Queensland, where her husband was interested in sugar-growing. During this term the future prima donna had a narrow escape from drowning. Mr. Armstrong took his wife and a guest out in a small sailing-boat at Port Mackay, and on crossing the bar they were soon in difficulties. A squall struck the little craft, which was overturned, and the three occupants were immersed in the deep waters of the Pacific. They succeeded in holding on to the upturned boat until assistance arrived from the pilot-station, where the look-out man had fortunately witnessed the accident. The heat and the monotony of life in North Queensland were not at all to the liking of Mrs. Armstrong, who almost regarded the yacht capsize as a welcome break in the dull routine of life.

Miss Mitchell's marriage made a very considerable break in her musical studies, but at every possible opportunity she endeavoured to improve herself as a performer on the organ and piano. Her principal teachers on these instruments were

Mr. Julius Buddee, Mr. Guenett, and Madame Charbonnet Kellermann—the last a clever Frenchwoman, whose daughter, Miss Annette Kellermann, has been much in the public eye of late years as the champion woman swimmer of the world. From early girlhood Mrs. Armstrong played the organ on many occasions at the Scots Church, Collins Street, and as a contributor of piano and organ solos she soon came to be in wide request for amateur musical functions. Her success as a musical amateur, and other circumstances, led to a wide popularity, which eventually came to be a considerable tax on her available financial resources, and this condition provided an extra and welcome excuse for her adoption of the professional life, to which she had always felt herself drawn. She had taken singing-lessons at intermittent periods from Signor Pietro Cecchi, a retired Italian singer, and as a result she now and again sang at some small private parties, where, however, her piano solos were always the main attraction. Over and over again it was freely stated that if she became a professional pianist she would be sure to make a pronounced success. At one of these private musical soirees given at Government House, Melbourne, Mrs. Armstrong supplemented her pianoforte solos by a vocal selection. At the conclusion of the latter, the late Marchioness of Normanby, wife of the then Governor of Victoria, said: "Child, you play brilliantly, but you sing better. Some day you will give up the piano for singing, and then you will become famous." This was at a time when everyone had been thinking of Mrs. Armstrong as a possible pianist, and so it was that Lady Normanby was the first person to suggest the career of a singer for the young amateur. This lady's prediction shifted the whole channel of Mrs. Armstrong's thoughts, and on Saturday, May 17, 1884, as a pupil of Signor

Cecchi, she made her first public appearance as a singer at a complimentary concert for the benefit of Herr Elsassar, a local musician who had been overtaken by misfortune. Thenceforward her reputation in Australia as a vocalist began to grow, and during the latter part of that year and throughout 1885 she regularly sang at concerts. The first regular engagement she received was from Mr. George Musgrove, of Williamson, Garner, and Musgrove, the well-known Anglo-Australian impresarios, who gave her £20 a week during a concert season. Allowing for four concerts a week, this sum would work out at about £5 for each concert—terms which Mrs. Armstrong considered quite satisfactory. Seventeen years later, when she had become the most famous prima donna of the day, Mr. Musgrove was once more the impresario of her Australian concert tour, during which the receipts on one occasion at Sydney reached such a figure that her net share of the proceeds was £2,350—the largest sum ever paid to any singer in any part of the world for a single evening's vocalization.

The most important engagement she fulfilled in 1885 was for the initial tour just mentioned, with the Kruse concert party, which was headed by a very clever compatriot, Mr. Johann Kruse, who had already won liberal fame in Europe as a violinist, and at whose home in Richmond, Melbourne, Miss Mitchell had already found many opportunities of revelling in that musical atmosphere which she so sincerely loved. The Australian public, as a whole, did not regard Mrs. Armstrong as a vocal marvel, but the newspaper critics, in the most whole-hearted manner, proclaimed her remarkable gifts, and she worked on with untiring energy towards the perfection of her musical heritage. But because of the easy circumstances of

her family, her early marriage to a man of good prospects, or some non-evident cause, the Australian public never allowed her to separate herself entirely from the ranks of the amateur; and when, after eighteen months' experience, she decided to try her fortune in Europe, it could not be reasonably claimed that the people of her own country recognized in her the possibilities of future greatness. In December 1885, she sang in Sydney, New South Wales, with the Sydney Liedertafel and the Sydney Philharmonic Society, and on each occasion, especially for her share in the latter's production of the "Messiah" under the conductorship of Monsieur Henri Kowalski, she received the warm commendation of the critics. A month later Mrs. Armstrong gave a farewell concert on January 22 at the Masonic Hall, Sydney, when the Hon. Daniel O'Connor, on behalf of her friends, presented her with a handsome gold badge, which Lady Carrington affixed on her breast. Lord Carrington was at that time Governor of New South Wales, and he and Lady Carrington on that evening began the friendship which has been kept up ever since.

Towards the close of 1885 Mrs. Armstrong was engaged as principal soprano in the choir of St. Francis's Roman Catholic Church in Melbourne, then and now noted for its splendid musical service. She regarded this recognition of her musical progress as very encouraging. Perhaps it is because of it that, although she still belongs to the denomination of her forefathers, she cherishes a lingering interest in all things appertaining to the Roman Catholic Church, the picturesque ritual and romantic traditions of which would in any case appeal to her artistic sense. On severing her connection with this choir as a preliminary to her departure for England in March 1886, the members presented her with an illuminated

valedictory address, couched in terms of extreme eulogy and good-will. She had only been with them for four months, and the kindly feeling which they showed, in spite of the brevity of the association and the difference of faith, may be cited as an early instance of that power of winning strong regard which has since become one of the happiest features of her personality. During Mrs. Armstrong's brief Australian career as a singer, she appeared in different cities of the Eastern States with varying financial success. Severed engagements of considerable local importance fell to her lot, but in a bid for the sustained support of the public, through the medium of a concert tour given during January 1886, she was rewarded by such scanty patronage that in some cases the receipts did not cover the rent of the hall.

Now, as has already been mentioned, when back again in Melbourne, more than a year after her marriage, Mrs. Armstrong had, on the pressing invitation of Signor Cecchi, resumed her singing-lessons with him at such irregular intervals as her circumstances would allow. These lessons had been continued during 1885, but with greater irregularity, owing to her frequent absences from Melbourne at the concert engagements she fulfilled in that year at Sydney, Ballarat, Bendigo, Hamilton, and other places. In Melbourne, too, her concert appearances were many, if not very lucrative. Under these circumstances Signor Cecchi had said that he would make no charge for these intermittent lessons, but that, if she ever made the success which he believed she would make, she could then pay him—an arrangement not unusual in the musical profession. How liberal that payment would have been those who know the singer can easily understand.

All this time her heart was set on seeking fame in Europe—an ambition which Signor Cecchi consistently encouraged. Towards securing funds for the purpose of travel and study, she gave concerts in New South Wales and Victoria, which, as already stated, ended in financial failure. Thus, at the beginning of 1886 she was still, apparently, far from the realization of her dream. Her father had by this time become convinced that her craving for an active life in music must be seriously reckoned with, and when he was appointed Victorian Commissioner to the Indian and Colonial Exhibition held in London that year, he invited Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong to accompany him, and agreed to pay for a year's lessons under whatever teacher she selected. The farewell concert in Sydney had left a small financial balance to her credit, and that held in Melbourne realized the modest sum of £65. Supplementary to her father's assistance, this money would help to pay for clothes and the other expenses necessarily incidental to her ambitious undertaking.

When everything was settled, and when the prospect of a fair start seemed favourable, Signor Cecchi, acting on foolish advice, or for some other reason, applied for immediate payment at full rates for the lessons he had given her during the preceding twenty months. At first the young singer was so astounded that she regarded the demand as a joke; but her momentary doubt was soon and sadly dispelled. Once again it seemed that the great desire of her life was to be thwarted, and this time by the teacher she had always gratefully esteemed as a friend. Fearful lest the knowledge of Signor Cecchi's action should reach her family, and revive their scarcely dormant opposition to her professional aspirations, she was reduced to a state of great mental embarrassment,

and designed one expedient after another, until she finally found a friend willing to lend her the money for the satisfaction of her teacher's account. When she got the loan, she paid to the last penny the full amount of Signor Cecchi's claim, which may have been made in a moment of chagrin or misunderstanding, but which, nevertheless, filled her with sorrow and disappointment. Then she drove the circumstance from her memory—or at least appeared to do so; for the name of Signor Cecchi never again escaped her lips, and if she has been resolutely silent as to his share in her early vocal training, her lips have also been as resolute in the still more characteristic silence that refused to link his name with one word of blame.

The Governor of Victoria and Lady Loch were the principals in the audience at the Melbourne Town Hall on Saturday, March 6—the occasion of Mrs. Armstrong's farewell concert in her native colony (now State). Here again the critics were unanimous in their praise, and if during the two preceding years the public had not given the young singer the support she deserved, it was not through want of intelligent direction on the part of the authorities to whom musical amateurs usually look for guidance. In the years that followed, the Australian people were so fearful lest they should allow another "Melba" to go forth to the great world of Europe without proper recognition, that every local vocal aspirant who announced her intention of seeking European fame was rewarded with exceptional evidence of public interest and generosity. On March 11, 1886, Mrs. Armstrong, accompanied by her husband and baby and her father, sailed for England preparatory to entering on her task as a student of grand opera, in which domain of music she had now definitely

decided to endeavour to make a name. This decision on the part of one who had never heard grand opera, in whose environment there was not a single fostering element towards that goal, and whose young life was already largely filled by her husband and little son, was in itself striking evidence of the independence of her character, and of that mysterious call which guides the destinies of the singer who is born, not made.

CHAPTER III

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On May 4, 1886, a few days after her first arrival in England, at the opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, Madame Albani sang "Home, Sweet Home," and at its conclusion Mrs. Armstrong, who had listened throughout with rapt attention, remarked, with a gratified sigh: "That's worth coming from Melbourne to hear." This initial element of greatness—the ability to appreciate greatness in others—was early manifest in Melba, who in the succeeding years has given constant evidence of the most whole-hearted *camaraderie*.

The indefinable inner persuasion as to future success in a musical career which Mrs. Armstrong had felt in a vague way since her earliest childhood, and the confidence in this future which later years definitely developed, were not destined to receive any impetus during the period immediately following her first arrival in England. She sought a hearing wherever possible, from persons of established positions in the world of music, and the opinion they expressed was not calculated to cheer the young Australian in her self-imposed task of winning operatic fame. As ill-luck would have it. Sir Hubert Parry had been forced to make a rule against hearing in private the applicants for musical distinction who were just then arriving in shoals, and so could not even grant her a hearing for which she had asked.

The late Sir Arthur Sullivan did not consider her vocal attainments sufficiently good to justify his suggesting her inclusion in the Savoy Opera Company, although he did add that, if she worked hard, he might be able to get her an

engagement in "The Mikado" after a year's further study. The prospect of entering the musical profession through the medium of light opera, however, had no real attraction for her. After an interview with Signor Alberto Randegger, Mrs. Armstrong received the disheartening intimation that he did not feel warranted in accepting her as a pupil. In after years Sir Arthur and Signor Randegger were numbered among her warmest friends and admirers, and on many an occasion of triumph for her she used to tease them both for their early want of confidence in her powers—a want of confidence probably justified by some temporary circumstance. The result of these setbacks on the young and ambitious Australian, just arrived in a country of the conditions of which she knew little or nothing, reduced her to considerable depression, yet in no way interfered with her determination to fight for success. The first glimpse of encouragement she received in London was from Mr. Wilhelm Ganz, who pronounced a favourable opinion on her voice, and gave her an opportunity to sing at Emil Bach's concert in Prince's Hall on June 1, 1886, and also at the dinner of the Royal General Theatrical Fund in the Freemasons' Hall. She had brought a letter of introduction from Mr. A. Cellier to Mr. Ganz, who further made an appointment for her with Mr. Carl Rosa; but the note of appointment which the manager had pencilled on his cuff as a reminder escaped his attention, and when she called at Mr. Ganz's house in Harley Street, where the meeting was to take place, he was not there. She waited long and patiently, but he never came, and, although most anxious for an opening, it is characteristic of her that she could not be induced to make a second appointment with the momentarily careless manager.

Mrs. Armstrong soon realized the advisability of entering on a term of study abroad, and she went to Paris and presented herself to Madame Mathilde Marchesi, to whom she bore a letter of introduction from Madame Elise Wiedermann Pinschoff, wife of the Austro-Hungarian Consul at Melbourne, herself a singer and teacher of considerable reputation. Madame Marchesi's reception of her visitor was very cordial, and after the young aspirant had sung her first song, the veteran teacher turned away, and, without speaking, hurried to the door of the apartment. Mrs. Armstrong, already severely disappointed by expert opinion in London, was in a state of acute eagerness for Madame Marchesi's pronouncement, and when the old lady moved as if to leave the room, the few intervening moments seemed like so many hours. On reaching the door, Madame Marchesi, without any preliminary, called to her husband: "Salvatore, Salvatore! at last I have found a star." The relief which this announcement gave to the waiting student was unbounded, and, as she has often since remarked, she then considered herself already well advanced towards her ideal. Marchesi's fear seemed to be that the new-comer would not take her art very seriously, and on this score she questioned her closely. Taking both the Australian's hands in hers, she said: "Mrs. Armstrong, are you serious?" "Yes," answered the other simply. "Then," added Madame Marchesi with great emphasis and decision, "if you are serious, and can study with me for one year, I will make something extraordinary of you." The old lady pronounced the word "extraordinary" in two quite distinct words, as though by this means she could more forcibly impress on Mrs. Armstrong the possibilities of her future. The new student quickly gave ample evidence of absolute earnestness, untiring industry, and