

TABLE TALK
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An Illustrious Australian.

Stella Lewis Marks—Famous Miniaturist.

Born and trained in Melbourne, Stella Lewis Marks has won high honor abroad. She has been elected a member of the Royal Society of Miniaturists, London, and a member of the New York Society of Miniaturists. Her methods and views are given in an interesting article.

"I am so pleased to see you," is the welcome from Mrs. Montague Marks, as she comes forward with friendly unaffected manner, in her bright sitting room at Menzies.

"This is my little Patricia," indicating a fairy sprite of a child who enters from the adjoining room. She seems all great brown eyes, fair curls, and clear olive skin. "She is like her mother, but is the image of her father, only that his hair is dark," her mother explains.

The little girl is daintiness itself, and loves her mother's miniatures, it is discovered, especially "the baby." This is herself at five months old.

After a few minutes' chat, Mrs. Marks asks whether it would be interesting to see some of her miniatures, and while showing them, and telling of her various sitters, many of them celebrated people, she reveals herself, and it is only then it is appreciated how great a celebrity we have in our midst, in this charming, youthful looking matron, who is already at the very head of her profession in her special line of art, that of miniaturist.

Her whole career has been romance, her marriage and her rise to fame, but unfortunately one can only just touch upon it, or the story would be too long. She and her husband were both born in Melbourne, and were fellow students at the Melbourne Gallery at the same time as Penleigh Boyd, who was Montague Marks's close chum. As Stella Lewis, a member of a family who are well known in Victoria—her uncle was Julius Lewis, Bishop of Ballarat —Mrs. Marks had made a promising start in her ca-

reer before she left Australia, She is little, she is nice, not only has she met all kinds of interesting people, but can describe them in a racy way, with graphic touches which make, them live for her hearers. She is blessed with a keen sense of humor, which adds to her charm.

"It is twelve years since I left Australia, and even then I had only returned here for a short time after two years in London. I held a show of my work here and another in Perth, and was just becoming established.

"Then we felt we must get back to one of the big cities—London or Paris. We set off via America. This was in 1914, and then came the war. It was useless going on to London or Paris, of course, and New York was so wonderful that we stopped there. We did not, at that time, think the war was going to be such a terrible thing.

"Later my husband went to Canada and joined the Royal Flying Corps, and my brother went to the war. I was in New York alone, and it was a dreadful time for me.

"I have only been away from New York twice, that was when I went to Canada to paint Princess Patricia, and for a second visit to stay with people whom I had met when I was at Government House there.

"I had no idea of holding an exhibition here, and have only my own miniatures with me." Like all true artists, she loves her work, and feels it part of herself.

"I always say when I am rich enough I would like to buy all my miniatures back."

Her quick rise to fame came by chance, she says.

"The show of the American Society of Miniature Painters was announced. I thought I could send in four that I had ready. I scarcely expected one to be accepted, for this society prides itself upon maintaining a very high standard, and I was quite unknown there. I heard nothing about them. They did not come back. Then came artists' day, the day before the opening, when the artists are invited to see their work hung. I went, and was quite excited and thrilled to see all four of mine hung in a most favorable position. I was still more thrilled next day when the notices came out, and I found the critics had placed me next to their acknowledged greatest miniaturist, who was long established. After commenting upon her work, they followed with mine, and their notices were most flattering.

"The biggest sensation of all was when I reached the exhibition after the opening to see a big red seal on one of my miniatures, denoting it was sold. It was one I had done in Perth, the

figure of a red headed girl, which I had called 'The Girl in White.' I had kept the background white, she wore a white frock, and the only color relief was the hair, the face and hands.

"It is a most unusual thing to sell a figure miniature first thing at an exhibition. You might sell a landscape or fancy subject, but a portrait study rarely, and consequently every one was surprised.

"They made me a member of the New York Society of Miniature Painters, and I am also a member of the British Royal Society of Miniaturists. Bess Norris was the first Australian to be made a member, I believe, and I am the second. I am very proud of the honor. I did not seek it, and therefore It was all the greater compliment. The president of the Royal Society, Alynne Williams, visited New York, and when he was dining at the house of the wife of one of my sitters, saw one of my miniatures she was wearing. He asked to be allowed to examine it, and was told she had more of my work upstairs, if he would like to see it. He got in touch with me, said he would like to show some of my work in London, and took some back with him. Later he wrote and said they would like to make me a member. The American society did not ask me, simply sent to say I had been made a member."

The strength and virility of Mrs. Marks's work, shown in the portraits of men, is a marked feature, and the fact is commented upon.

"All the critics mention that point. I returned to my oil painting, and do portraits in oil from time to time in order to keep up the broadness and strength of my work. If I found I was losing it I should give up miniature painting. I owe that to Bernard Hall's teaching at the Melbourne Gallery, and to Mr. McCubbin's insistence upon good drawing. So many miniaturists pay practically no attention to drawing first, and you must have it, and a knowledge of anatomy and form, in order to succeed in portraiture of any kind.

"When I am working, Bernard Hall's Insistence upon the importance of keeping one's work simple, always recurs to me, and you see I use as little brush work as possible. Your brush can make the portrait. The hair should express the individual just as much as the face, for it is part of the individual of the portrait, and helps to express' the personality. The clothes, too, are part of the portrait,

"When people say to me that it does not matter what they wear, I do not agree. The line of the clothes is important, for

each one wears them differently, and they are part of the person, even in children. Look at this one, and this, you see the line of the shoulder is quite different. This one is high, therefore that child is short necked, and that is part of her personality, and must be expressed for a portrait to be true.

"What I first try to get is color, movement, life, and to that end I make my sitters talk, and watch their movements, their expression, their manner, in order to gain the atmosphere which afterwards helps me to express their personality. I think that is why people for whom I have done miniatures often say, 'I feel just as though they are going to speak to me.' That is what I strive to put into them—Life.

"I often tell a sitter to smile, and explain, 'I am not going to paint you smiling,' and they cannot understand. It is to watch the expression, the line of the muscles as they fall back into repose, and I want to catch them just at that moment of repose after smiling,

"Girls have come to me here for advice about becoming artists. I tell them they have the best training in the world at the Melbourne Gallery, but to succeed they must work hard. It is no use telling a girl she has talent, and prophesying success. Something more than talent is necessary. If she has not the application that will make her work hard, and with enthusiasm, talent is little use. It is that something inside one, the capacity for persevering, hard work that counts, and it is not everyone with talent who has application."