

GEORGE W. LININGER PIONEER : TRAVELER : ART COLLECTOR

Future Historian Will Award Him Honor and Credit for Bringing Love for the Fine Arts Into a New Country and for Giving His Fellow Citizens a Collection That is Unsurpassed in America

TWO OR THREE centuries hence when Omaha shall be inhabited by a people less strenuous and more leisurely, less wrapped up in practical affairs and more regardful of esthetic, when great municipal galleries shall be maintained for the delectation of the public and where schools of art shall flourish, when Omaha shall have attained that stage of esthetic development to which the cities of the old world have attained, it will be desirable to write a history of western art. And the author who shall set himself this task will search back to the nineteenth century. There he will find the name of George W. Lininger, standing pre-eminent as the earliest connoisseur, the most careful critic and the most liberal patron of art in Omaha. If we may be permitted to anticipate this twenty-second century author, the opening paragraphs of his work will be something like this:

"George Washington Lininger is the father of Nebraska art. His name stands out by itself in the early art annals of the west. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Omaha was founded upon the plains of Nebraska. It grew rapidly, so rapidly that, like a boy, it ran wild and its people had little appreciation for the philosophy of the fine arts. The citizens were nearly all engaged in commerce. Great houses were established and the trade done throughout the western country was immense. The city gained a name in that which was, in those days, most desirable, namely, commercial strength and business stability.

"Lininger was at first engaged, like all the other citizens, in commerce. He was a pioneer in the business of selling agricultural implements to the great farming population of the western country, which was then springing into the foremost rank of the world for the fertility of its soil. The gods seem to have favored the young man, for his business grew to such an extent that he was enabled to retire while still young from active pursuits. He then went to Europe and began his great collection.

Seeds of Art Sown at Home

"His home city was too busy with its business pursuits to pay much attention to his efforts at first. He built an addition onto his home for a gallery and opened it freely to the public. He gave freely of his means and time to arouse an interest in art. But the city was too new, too busy in establishing itself, to give due interest to such matters. The good effect of this work, however, upon the generations of after years was very great. Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Dresden and Rome all passed through the stage, which Omaha was then passing and in each instance there was some man like Lininger who sowed the early seeds."

If this suppositious author in the twenty-second century writes along the lines above quoted he will be correct in statement of facts and in his estimate of the position of George W. Lininger in Omaha. Mr. Lininger is one of those rare individuals possessing a practical business mind together with a taste for the esthetic and the eye of the connoisseur. Many successful business men have devoted themselves to collecting art, but few have made it more than a hobby. Most of them have been the prey of dealers, paying exorbitant prices because they could not distinguish really valuable works of art from the worthless.

Son of a small New Jersey farmer and tailor, brought up on the frontier of Illinois, engaged for years in the stove, tin and hardware business, it seems strange that the thoughts and energies of this remarkable man should have turned in his latter days so ardently to the poetic in color and design, to the beautiful productions of the advanced thought of all ages. In this anomaly is a field for those who love to speculate upon the mysteries of heredity. It may easily be, indeed, that somewhere back in the dim centuries an ancestor of Mr. Lininger was an artist, for the family traces its line to the German nobility. These ancestors in the seventh century owned a castle on the Rhine, a principality of more than 100 square miles, and kept an army of retainers to assist them in collecting their tribute. Mr. Lininger early manifested a taste for art. While still engaged in the hardware business he purchased several pictures. But the struggle for a livelihood left little time and yielded little money for artistic pursuits.

Boyhood and Business Life

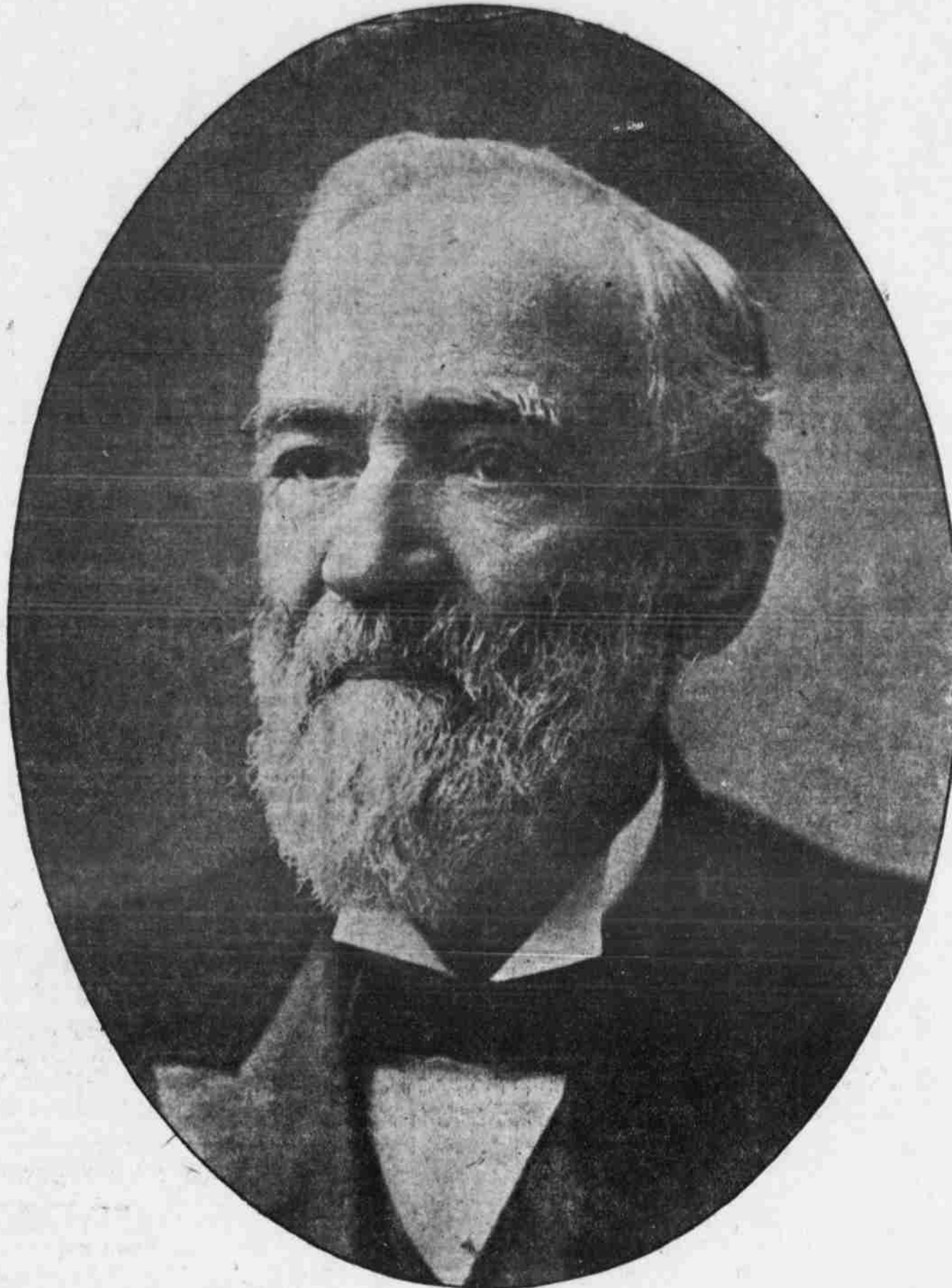
The first twelve years of his life were spent in Chambersburg, Pa., where he was born December 14, 1834. His father was in moderate circumstances and, when a friend who had been in Ohio returned and told wonderful tales of the fertility of the country beyond the Alleghenies, he put his family, his goods and chattels on a wagon and emigrated to Illinois. He operated a sawmill for some time and then moved to the town of Peru, where George grew up, entered the hardware business and, in 1856, married Miss Caroline M. Newman. He might have spent his life there in the village, his artistic longings stifled by circumstances. But again Fate stepped in, disguised this time as Death. Physicians told him his only chance for life was in going west, so he started for Kansas. That country not suiting him, he came north and settled in Council Bluffs where, in 1868, with E. L. Shugart as a partner, he established the first jobbing agricultural implement house on the Missouri river under the name of Shugart & Lininger. Five years later the firm moved across the river and changed its name to the G. W. Lininger company. In 1881 it became the Lininger & Metcalf company and is now the Lininger implement company. Mr. Lininger has always been president of the firm and has directed its policy. He has seen it grow from a small concern with only one employe to its present great proportions. Honesty, integrity and industry have made it a success. A year ago in reorganizing his business he did something characteristic of himself by taking into the firm ten young men who had served him faithfully for a number of years.

Mr. Lininger has always been a mover in enterprises for building up the city. He was interested in the nail works, the wire works and other commercial enterprises of early days; was a member of the Board of Trade and of the executive committee of the Commercial club for years; is now president of the Bee Building company and a director in The Bee Publishing company; is president of the Nebraska Masonic home and was a member of the city council in 1878, when he worked hard to get the city to install its own water works plant. He was a member of the state senate in 1887. He served on the Omaha Board of Park Commissioners for a number of years, where his services were of particular value because of his observations on the park systems of the finest foreign cities.

Services to the Art World

But all these activities pale into insignificance when compared with his services in the world of art. It is here that he has gained the name that shall endure. During thirty years he has searched the world for its choicest treasures, examining ancient palaces, exploring European pawnshops, where decayed families have often disposed surreptitiously of the treasures of their ancestors; delving into ruined castles, digging into the very pyramids of Egypt. Through forty countries in all parts of the world he has hunted. He has made five trips to Europe and three to Mexico, besides visiting every state in the Union.

He has been indefatigable in this work, traveling tens of thousands of miles and undergoing all manner of hardships to get rare examples of art. The result is the fine collection which he has in his home today. In very few houses in America is there such a wealth of rare treasures as in the home of Mr. Lininger at Eighteenth and Davenport streets. There are more than 300 pictures altogether, including some of the finest in the world. J. Hovey Allen, the eminent critic, has pronounced Mr. Lininger's collection of the old masters the finest in America. There are three pictures by Guido Reni, the Italian master, who painted two of the twelve great pictures of the world. There are canvases by Rubens and Rembrandt and Titian and many others of the masters. And there



GEORGE W. LININGER.

are many paintings by the modern artists. There is a magnificent lieve they have the genuine piece in the Louvre and that only the piece of Limoges, an example of the lost art of rendering painting on copy of this work is in America, but—well—nothing must be said in copper iridescent. There is one magnificent piece which came from print, for the Europeans are jealous of their art treasures and the palace of one of the greatest families of Italy. The French be-

might make things unpleasant. There are also ceramics and carved

ivories and hammered metal goods and statuary and a countless variety of all manner of exquisite curios from all countries in all ages. The Lininger collection includes examples of art for every century for the last 4,000 years.

Every room in the house is a treasury of art. All nations have contributed their finest and richest to furnish the rooms of this very remarkable house. The first article which meets the eye of the visitor as he enters the hall is a big settee of teakwood exquisitely carved and inlaid. This is an example of Japanese work of a century ago. In the various rooms are articles of furniture from all nations and of all periods. Spanish cabinets, Florentine mosaics, old Holland furniture, rare tapestries, Italian ivory and bronze furniture, royal Dresden cabinets, French buhl, Venetian mirrors—these are only a few of the bewildering array of rare things to be seen, many of them priceless, all of them worthy of a place in the leading museums of the world. There is a Spanish cabinet made of turtle shell inlaid with bronze and ivory. Mr. Lininger picked this up in Granada, whither he ventured in 1888, just after the terrible cholera plague had blotted out many families. One cabinet which stands in the hall is an example of Arabian work. It came from Damascus and is curiously and wonderfully inlaid with words of the Arabic language in ivory.

What tales this furniture might tell if it could speak! For it has stood in the palaces of the great of all nations. Kings and queens and princes have sat in those royal chairs. Royal jewels have been deposited in the drawers of those exquisite ancient cabinets. Those pieces of furniture have been present at great functions state. At royal betrothals, funerals, intrigues among the great of the earth, they have stood in their places, silent witnesses. And now they are gathered under the roof of this one house.

His Den a Unique Collection

The den which Mr. Lininger has fitted up for himself is a particularly interesting place, though different in its furnishings from the other rooms of the house in that the furnishings of the den have nearly all an air of the savage, the heathen, the pagan about them. There are spears and tomahawks, weapons of the aborigines, all manner of swords, shields and armor, battle axes and weapons of war. The walls are hung with elegant old tapestries and beautiful examples of old needlework. Idols before which millions have worshiped, grin from their corners in the room, while a prayer wheel occupies a prominent position on the wall. There are a thousand other little things, characteristic of the heathen and the mediæval European races in this room, its contents coming from thirty different countries.

Few people of Omaha realize what a wonderful gallery of art is in their midst. People with the esthetic taste that is bred by residence in the art-saturated atmosphere of foreign cities have come half way round the world to see this collection; ambassadors from foreign countries have made the trip from Washington for the especial purpose of examining it, critics and painters have come thousands of miles to see it, but thousands of people in Omaha have never taken the opportunity to view the paintings which are offered for their delectation without money and without price. Omaha receives prominent mention in Baedeker's guide book of America, and more space is given to the Lininger art gallery than to anything else. It even is marked with an asterisk, the "mark of commendation" which Karl Baedeker is extremely squeamish about giving to anything.

One morning while the Transmississippi exposition was in progress three Japanese visited the gallery. They spent several hours with catalogs examining the pictures and other art treasures. Before they left they sought out the owner of the gallery and presented their cards. One of them proved to be the son of a member of the Mikado's cabinet, the minister of commerce. Another was the son of the mayor of Kyoto. The former of these two extended Mr. Lininger an invitation to visit his father's palace if he should ever come to Japan. They were especially skilled in judging needlework and they declared that the examples of this art in the Lininger collection could not be equalled today.

Library Contains Rare Books

A library of several thousand volumes has a place in Mr. Lininger's home. It includes some very rare old books, one being the actual work of Gutenberg, the inventor of printing. Hundreds of books treat of the art works in which he has taken such a great interest.

There is a picture in the gallery which he bought for a song and for which he has refused an offer of several thousand dollars. This is one example of the fact that Mr. Lininger is a connoisseur and no mere dilettante in art. Probably the finest piece of carved ivory in the world is in the collection and this he picked up in a European pawn shop.

To foster art in Omaha has been his constant endeavor and it is a disappointment to him that the city as a city takes no greater interest in it. He has given of his time, his money, his effort and his experience to this end. He was the foremost mover in the formation of the Western Art association and was its first president. The first interstate art exhibition was held in his gallery in November, 1888. He tried to start other movements and always took the deepest and most unselfish interest in students. He "discovered" J. G. Borglum and Solon Borglum, sons of an Omaha physician. He sent them to the best schools of Europe. The former is now in the front rank of American painters, while the latter has reached the same eminence as a sculptor. J. G. Borglum is doing much of the work on the magnificent Church of St. John the Divine, now being erected in New York.

Mr. Lininger's gallery has been open to the public for years on Thursday and Sunday of each week, free of charge, and thousands have visited it. Most of these have been from the schools and clubs of the city and state. He has helped to foster art throughout the state by lending his pictures for exhibitions held to raise money. Six years ago while in Egypt he made a collection of mummies and other Egyptian curiosities, shipped them to Omaha and presented them to the city. The size of the gift may be shown by the fact that the consignment weighed ten tons. The city at once placed the goods in the city library building. But there was no fund available for the classification of them and, when Mr. Lininger returned, he spent two months classifying and spent a large sum of money in building cases for the display of a collection that is not surpassed in America.

Masonry His Life Study

Masonry has been a lifelong study of Mr. Lininger. He has been a Mason for fifty years and has held all the high offices in the fraternity. It was the mysteries of the beginning of the order, shrouded as they are in the misty draperies of antiquity, which started him on his quest of Egyptian curiosities. Masonry is commonly traced back to the time of the building of the temple by the Jews, but Mr. Lininger has found the Masonic symbols in Egypt dating from hundreds of years before that.

Two children have been born to Mr. and Mrs. Lininger. George Albert died when a child and Miss Florence was married to F. L. Haller, secretary of the Lininger implement company. Mr. Lininger was baptised a Lutheran, but has been most closely affiliated with the Episcopal church.

The best work of a thousand men of all ages whose bones have been dust for centuries are preserved in the Lininger gallery and the Lininger home today. And it seems to the visitor that the spirits of those men hover about the place and lend to it a sort of mysterious charm that comes as he views the lapse of centuries and perceives in an hour the result of the tolling of millions of men for thousands of years.

Good Old King Oscar of Sweden

IN the course of a visit to Stockholm a year and a half ago—a long, delightful visit—I found myself face to face repeatedly with a phenomenon whose aspect, I was very sure, I had observed in no other continental capital. At first the mystery was evasive enough, but little by little, as my impression of the town continued to deepen in tone, its more intangible parts began to simplify themselves and loom appreciably distinct. Finally, for my curious sense, there was no escaping some sort of interpretation, the last stage of which unconscious process developed on the day of my departure. For it was then I felt, irresistibly, that, though I had had but the merest glimpse of him in the flesh, I was yet familiar with the spirit of the king. I knew now that I had seen reflected in so many things, material and immaterial, fruits of the will and the work of a beautifully human monarch. By these signs I could recognize the subtle sensibility, the educated conscience, the generous knowledge and large nature of Oscar II of Sweden. And I recall hearing myself mutter, not, I confess, without emotion: "This king at least has a soul."

Oscar, Fredrik, third son of the then Crown Prince Oscar (afterward Oscar I) and Princess Josephine, was born at Stockholm January 21, 1829. From his grandfather, Carl XIV Johan, he received the title of duke of Ostergothland. This title he bore until 1872, when, having become heir apparent by reason of the deaths of his brother Gustaf and the infant Crown Prince Carl Oscar, he succeeded Carl XV, whose demise occurred September 19 of the above year.

Prior to this period Oscar had taken little or no active interest in affairs of state. Only in an abstract way, through the medium of temperament perhaps, did he appreciate the import of administrative matters, politics, diplomacy. Of course it was inevitable that he should mingle with courtiers and hear more or less of the hum of the monarchical machinery. But his heart dwelt elsewhere. One cannot read the record of his apprenticeship in the navy (which began when he was but 10 years of age), or the even more illuminating story of his career as amateur traveler, poet, historian, scholar, without being struck by the truth of this. For a long time, however, he cherished but one prime aspiration—to see himself the commander of a fleet. He learned to love the sea with an intelligence

of instinct and a fervor of passion consummately wonderful. For the heroes of his boyhood and early manhood he had an affection and admiration, the best accessible proof of which may be found in his verses to such daring Swedish sea-fighters as Claes Uggla, Jonas Hokenfykt and Nils Ehrenskold. Many pages of King Oscar's "Ur Svenska Flottans minnen" (Out of the Story of the Swedish Navy) are devoted to a glorification of their deeds. The same book of poems, anonymously submitted, was awarded a prize by the Swedish academy in 1857, and contains what must be considered the author's finest poetic effort, the melodious, virile stanzas to the Baltic. Very fair translations of this poem exist in German and French.

Wandering through the published writings of Oscar Fredrik (as he always signs his productions), I one day found the following bit of sentiment:

More than life itself to many a youth is a flower to adorn the bosom of his love; and well it is that this be so.

If we regard the quaint little aphorism in the light of the most beautiful event in King Oscar's personal life, or apply it thereto, it will have twofold significance. I refer to his courtship with Princess Sophia of Nassau, at Monrepos castle, near the banks of the Rhine, in Koblenz, where the young couple first met. She was then 20, he 27. Beautiful, lovable, dearly fond of many of the very studies to the pursuit of which he was greatly devoted—history, languages, music—Oscar Fredrik soon saw in the German princess the woman of his dreams. September 26, 1856, they announced their betrothal, and, in commemoration, immediately afterward they cut their names in the trunk of a giant oak, benign witness to their troth. Likewise, the lovers planted a few of its acorns, one of which sprouted and became in the course of a year a two-leaved tree. This they transplanted in a flower pot and brought with them to Stockholm to set it out in the idyllic gardens of Drottningholm castle. Eight or nine years later, when Hans Christian Andersen was visiting the royal family there, Prince Oscar gave him a branch of the memorial tree, which, as the story-teller remarks, was even then taller than he. It is today one of the sturdiest of all the oaks on the grounds.

After his marriage to Princess Sophia the heir apparent cultivated his literary talent with renewed zeal. Such was the quality of his interest that it was no rare occurrence with him in those days to sit up till dawn discussing Runeberg, or Tegner, or Goethe, with some congenial companion. Strangely enough, however, he had no liking for the representatives of the New School (so-called), a reactionary party that championed "the rights of fancy and feeling within the domain of poetry" and deprecated and opposed the prevailing French standards and tastes in arts and letters, as instituted by Gustavus III. In 1859 he published a translation of Herder's version of "Poema del Cid," sumptuously illustrated and dedicated to his brother, the crown prince, likewise an amateur man of letters. Two years later, at his wife's initiative, he had rendered Goethe's "Torquato Tasso" into Swedish. As an aid to the perfecting of her knowledge of the language Princess Sophia copied the translator's manuscript, of many revisions and blurs, in an elegant hand, from which it was ultimately typed. The production is dedicated to her.

Few, if indeed any, of King Oscar's predecessors equal him as an orator. His eloquence has on more than one occasion proved a power by which he has been enabled distinctively to assert his royal position and authority. Sonorous, rich, musical, his voice is in itself a splendid artistic force. During the crisis with Norway, in June, 1904, I had the pleasure of hearing him address 10,000 or 15,000 loyal subjects who had gone to his country seat, Rosendal, on the outskirts of the capital, to express their approbation of his attitude and their affection for their king. He spoke very briefly, perhaps not more than 200 words. But there was a tremor in his voice, and an indefinable something about his bearing, his gestures, from whose haunting appeal it was impossible to escape. It was a most impressive spectacle. I shall never forget the sight of the venerable monarch standing there on the balcony, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, in the falling light, facing the multitude. Not like a crowned ruler did he look to me; I could distinguish only the man who, deeply conscious of the responsibilities of his office and the solemn significance of the particular hour, recognized above all the reciprocity of the issue, and, recognizing it, seemed indeed to be of the people that were doing him homage.

With his ascendancy to the throne his literary activities virtually ceased. He surely must have found it a somewhat awkward journey, the transit from the quiet (Continued on Page Four.)