

THE PRODIGIES.

WILLA CATHER.

"I AM ready at last, Nelson. Have I kept you very long?" asked Mrs. Nelson Mackenzie as she came hurriedly down the stairs. "I'm sorry, but I just had one misfortune after another in dressing."

"You don't look it," replied her husband, as he glanced up at her admiringly.

"Do you like it? O, thank you! I am never quite sure about this shade of green, it's so treacherous. I have had such a time. The children would not stay in the nursery and poor Elsie has lost her 'Alice in Wonderland' and wai's without ceasing because nurse cannot repeat the 'Walrus and the Carpenter' off hand."

"I should think everyone about this house could do that. I know the who's fool book like the catechism," said Mackenzie as he drew on his coat.

"Is the carriage there?"

Mackenzie didn't answer. He knew that Harriet knew perfectly well that the carriage had been waiting for half an hour.

"I hope we shan't be late," remarked Harriet as they drove away. "But it's just like Kate to select the most difficult hour in the day and recognize no obstacles to our appearing. She admits of no obstacles either for herself or other people. You've never met her except formally, have you? We saw a great deal of each other years ago. I took a few vocal lessons from her father and was for a time the object of her superabundant enthusiasm. If there is anything in the world that has not at some time been its object I don't know it. One must always take her with a grain of allowance. But even her characteristic impracticability does not excuse her for inviting busy people at four o'clock in the afternoon."

"I suppose it's the only hour at which the prodigies exhibit."

"Now don't speak disrespectfully, Nelson. They really are very wonderful children. I fancy Kate is working them to death, that's her way. But I don't think I ever heard two young voices of such promise. They sang at Christ Church that Sunday you didn't go, and I was quite overcome with astonishment. They have had the best instruction. It's wonderful to think of mere children hoving such method. As a rule juvenile exhibitions merely appeal to the maternal element in one, but when I heard them I quite forgot that they were children. I assure you they quite deserve to be taken seriously."

"All the same I shouldn't like to be exhibiting my children about like freaks."

"Poor Nelson! there's not much danger of your ever being tempted. It's extremely unlikely that poor Billy or Elsie will ever starve the world. Really, do you know when I heard those Massey children and thought of all they have done, of all they may do, I envied them myself. To youth everything is possible—when anything at all is possible."

Harriett sighed and Mackenzie fancied he detected a note of disappointment in her voice. He had suspected before that Harriett was disappointed in her children. They suited him well enough, but Harriet was different.

If Harriet Norton had taken up missionary work in the Cannibal Islands her friends could not have been more surprised than when she married Nelson Mackenzie. They had slated her for a very different career. As a girl she possessed unusual talent. After taking sundry honors at the New Eng-

land conservatory, she had studied music abroad. It had been rumored that Leschetizky was about to launch her on a concert tour as a piano virtuoso, when she had suddenly returned to America and married the one among all her admirers who seemed particularly unsuited to her. Mackenzie was a young physician, a thoroughly practical, methodical Scotchman, rather stout, with a tendency to baldness, and with a propensity for blowing the cornet. This latter fact alone was certainly enough to disqualify him for becoming the husband of a pianiste. When it reached Leschetizky's ears that Miss Norton had married a cornet-playing doctor, he "recorded one lost soul more," and her name never passed his lips again. Even her former rivals felt that they could now afford to be generous, and with one accord sent their congratulations to herself and husband "whom they had heard was also a musician."

Harriet received these neat sarcasms with great amusement. She had known when she married him that Mackenzie played the cornet, that he even played "Promise Me;" but she considered it one of the most innocent diversions in which a man could indulge. But Harriet had not married him to inaugurate a romance or to develop one. She had seen romances enough abroad and knew by heart that fatal fifth act of marriages between artists. She was sometimes glad that there was not a romantic fiber in Mackenzie's substantial frame. She had married him because for some inexplicable reason she had always been fond of him, and since her marriage she had never been disappointed or disillusioned in him. He was not a brilliant man, and his chief merits were those of character—virtues not always fascinating, but they wear well in a husband and are generally about the easiest things to be married to.

So, in Mackenzie's phraseology, they had "pulled well enough together." Of course Mrs. Mackenzie had her moments of rebellion against the monotony of the domestic routine, and felt occasional stirrings of the old restlessness for achievement and the old thirst of the spirit. But knowing to what unspiritual things this soul thirst had led women aforetime, she resolved to live the common life at least commonly well.

But her married life had held one very bitter disappointment. Her children. Someway she had never doubted that her children would be like her. She had settled upon innumerable artistic careers for them. Of course they would both have her talent for music, probably of a much finer sort than her own, and the boy would do all the great things that she had not done. She knew well enough that if the cruelly exacting life of art is not wholly denied a woman, it is offered to her at a terrible price. She had not chosen to pay it. But with the boy it would be different. He should realize all the dreams that once stirred in the breast on which he slept.

She had awaited impatiently the time when his little fingers were strong enough to strike the keys. But although he had heard music from the time he could hear at all, the child displayed neither interest nor aptitude for it. In vain his papa tooted familiar airs to him on the cornet; sometimes he recognized them and sometimes he did not. It was just the same with the little girl. The poor child could never sing the simplest nursery air correctly. They were both healthy, lively children, unusually

Attention, wheelmen! 25 per cent discount on all furnishing goods, which includes sweaters and golf hose. Armstrong Clothing Co.

REMOVAL SALE

To avoid breakage in moving our immense stock to our new location, 1109 O Street. We will make special prices on our entire line for the next twenty days. We have many bargains to offer you. Do not fail to call.

FUNK & OGDEN

truthful and well conducted, but thoroughly commonplace. Harriet could not resign herself to this, she could not understand it. There was always a note of envy in her voice when she spoke of the wonderful Massey children, whose names were on every one's lips. It seemed just as though Kate Massey had got what she should have had herself.

When the Mackenzies arrived at the Massey's door Mrs. Massey rushed past the servant and met them herself.

"I'm so glad you've come Harriet, dear. We were just about to begin and I didn't want you to miss Adrienne's first number. It's the waltz song from Romeo et Juliette; she had special drill on that from Madame Marchesi you know, and in London they considered it one of her best. I know this is a difficult hour, but they have to sing after dinner and I don't want to tax them too much. Poor dears! there are so many demands on their time and strength that I sometimes feel like fleeing to the North Pole with them. To the left, up stairs, Mr. Mackenzie. Harriet, you know the way." And their animated hostess dashed off in search of more worlds to conquer. Mrs. Massey's manner was always that of a conqueror fresh from the fray. She demanded of every one absolute capitulation and absolute surrender to the object of her particular enthusiasm, whatever that happened to be at the moment. Usually it was her wonderful children.

When the Mackenzies descended, Kate met them with a warning gesture and ushered them into the music room where the other guests were seated silently and expectantly. When they were seated she herself sank into a chair with an air of rapt and breathless anticipation.

The accompanist took her seat and a very pale, languid little girl came forward and stood beside the piano. She looked to be about fourteen but was unusually small for her age. She was a singularly frail child with apparently almost no physical reserve power, and stood with a slight natural stoop which she quickly corrected as she caught her mother's eye. Her great dark eyes seemed even larger than they were by reason of the dark circles under them. She clasped her hands and waited until the brief prelude was over. She seemed not at all nervous, but very weary. Even the spirited measures of that most vivacious of arias could not wholly dispel the listlessness from those eyes that were so sad for a child's face. As to the

merit or even the "wonder" of her singing, there was no doubt. Even the unmusical Mackenzie, who could not describe her voice in technical language, knew that this voice was marvellous from the throat of a child. The volume of a mature singer was of course not there, but her tones were pure and limpid and wonderfully correct. The thing that most surprised him was what his wife called the "method" of the child's singing. Gounod's waltz aria is not an easy one, and the child must have been perfectly taught. It seemed to him, though, that the little dash of gaiety she threw into it had been taught her, too, and that this child herself had never known what it was to be gay.

"O Kate, how I envy you!" sighed Harriet in a burst of admiration too sincere to be concealed.

Her hostess smiled triumphantly; she expected every one to envy her, took that for granted. As Mackenzie saw the little figure glide between the portieres, he was not quite so sure that he envied Massey.

Massey was a practical man of business like himself, who seemed rather overcome by the surprising talent of his children. He always stood a little apart from the musical circle which surrounded them, even in his own house, and when his wife took them abroad for instruction he stayed at home and supplied the funds. His natural reserve grew more marked as the years went by and he seemed so obliterated even at his own fireside that McKenzie sometimes fancied he regretted having given prodigies to the world.

Mrs. Massey turned to Harriet in an excited whisper: "Herman will only sing the 'Serenade.' He selected that because it saves his voice. The duet they will sing after dinner is very trying, it's the parting scene from Juliette, the one they will sing in concert next week."

The boy was the elder of the two; not so thin as his sister perhaps, but still pitifully fragile, with an unusually large head, all forehead, and those same dark, tired eyes. He sang the German words of that matchless serenade of Schubert's, so familiar, yet so perennially new and strange; so old, yet so immortally young. It was a voice like those one sometimes hears in the boy choirs of the great cathedrals of the old world, a voice that, untrained, would have been alto rather than tenor; clear, sweet, and vibrant, with an indefinable echo of melancholy. He was less limited by his physique than his sister, and it seemed impossible that such strong, sustained tones could come from that fragile body.

All hats and caps at 25 per cent discount. Armstrong Clothing Co.

Mother's 25 per cent discount on all boys' and children's clothing. Armstrong Clothing Co.

With every dollar purchase a very fine lithograph is given away at Riggs' Pharmacy, 1146 O street.