

The Passing Show.

WILLA CATHER.

"Do you know the world's white roof tree—do you know the windy rift
Where the baffling mountain eddies chop and change?
Do you know the long day's patience, belly down on frozen drift,
While the head of heads is feeding out of range?
It is there that I am going where the boulders and the snow lies,
With a nimble, trusty tracker that I know,
I have sworn an oath to keep it on the horns of Ovis Poli,
And the Red Gods call to me and I must go!"

—Kipling's "Feet of the Young Men."

In "entertaining" Fridtjof Nansen the Writers' club outdid itself. It has, indeed, favored Dr. Watson and Hopkinson Smith and Anthony Hope Hawkins and such like with supper and smokers and receptions, according to their several deserts. But Nansen is almost as much of a hero as Bob Fitzsimmons, and for him, only a state banquet was fitting. Besides it is the proper thing to banquet Nansen; the Prince of Wales started the fashion and far be it from loyal Americans to disregard such a precedent. They do say, too, that these continued banquets are using him up worse than the Pole, and that he quite pines for solitude and ice bergs and raw bears' meat and "Boreal climes of the Pole," where reporters and indigestion are not.

This particular banquet was given in the dining hall of the Hotel Henry, —the only other really first-class hotel here is called The Lincoln, by the way. The orchestra fiddled and tooted in a clump of palms and the tables were decorated with La France roses and maiden's-hair ferns. I will spare you the menu. All the elite were there, for this was no mere humble man of letters whom we were "entertaining." Even the mayor of the city came and made a toast and quoted Shakespeare and ate with his knife. They say that Chris Magee "runs" the mayor and has taught him all he knows about politics. I must say I wish he would teach him table manners.

The toastmaster of the occasion was Mr. Samuel Harraden Church, who is always trotted out on such occasions. Now a word of this gentleman. He is a rather interesting personage. It seems that he used to work for the great and only Carnegie, and Carnegie, the founder of concert halls, art galleries and libraries, took a notion that it would be a worthy and benevolent thing to manufacture a novelist; so he educated Mr. Church and sent him abroad and awaited developments. In the course of time Mr. Church wrote a biography of Oliver Cromwell, which I have not read and consequently can say nothing about. This year a reputable house has published his historical novel, "John Marmaduke," a story of Cromwell's time, in which one of the characters remarks that he "was raised in Ireland," and in which the fair heroine is called "Miss Catherine" throughout. In a very casual reading I found some two hundred or more of the grossest anachronisms. Andrew Carnegie may control the iron market of the world, but he and all his millions can't make a novelist. That is one of the little perquisites that the Lord reserves for himself.

Well, this celebrated Mr. Samuel Harraden Church began his toast to Nansen with a quotation from "Lucile," one of the worst he could have selected, too.

"Not a truth has to art
or to science been given,

But brows have ached for it
and souls toiled and striven;
And many have striven,
and many have failed,
And many died, slain by
the truth they assailed."

Could anything have been more heart-rending? Poor Nansen! who has all Browning at his tongue's end, and claims even to have read "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," it only remains to hope that he had never heard of "Lucile" and its odium. The rest of Mr. Church's toast, however, was rather better than its discouraging beginning. I will quote it in full:

"At the frozen North Pole there dwells a spectre, clad in snow and ice, that beckons men on forever to honor and to death. It guards the secret of the centuries, and while luring men into its habitation, defies them to pluck out the heart of its mystery. Yet who shall say that even Nature is impregnable in her icebound fortress? Arctic exploration began in the sixteenth century, and now each generation finds men pressing in closer to the Pole and overcoming its outer barriers, like soldiers of fortune. In 1594 Barentz sailed from Holland, and when he had made a first mark on Arctic geography of 702 miles from the Pole he laid him down on the ice and died.

"Greely's stop at 455 miles from the Pole was farthest north until 1895. In that year all records were broken when Nansen passed Greely and stopped at 195 miles beyond him. When the pack closed up on the ship the Fram rose like a saucy spirit of the air and floated 1,200 miles on top of the ice. The pack had lost its power to crush, and the bold designer had overcome the most relentless barrier to past achievement. That was one fact. But mark the other. When the Fram had successfully begun her strange sail above the water, and vindicated the bold purpose of her master the intrepid explorer bade farewell to his comrades, stepped over the side like some Lohengrin not amenable to Nature, and fearlessly pressed on to the Pole, pursuing his wild way in the piercing splendor of a comet. When he had gone 195 miles beyond every human foot he was stopped by a hill of ice, unscalable and terrible. The Pole was only 260 miles away—about as far as Boston is from New York. But he had done enough. In the annals of all exploration his performance has never been beaten, save by Columbus. I ask you then to join me in drinking health and happiness throughout his life to Pittsburgh's guest and the world's hero, whom I now present to you—Dr. Fridtjof Nansen."

• • •

Dr. Nansen's reply was as simple and modest as his lecture:

"It is one of the saddest facts in life that we meet only to part. In my life it is a most prominent fact. Every day I meet friends only to leave them the next. It is the lot of the traveler, and I am a traveler. I cannot rest from travel. I go roaming about with a hungry heart, plucking here and there a flower for remembrance. Of these there shall always be one from Pittsburgh.

"There is one thing I should like to impress upon the minds of my friends. Men do not go to the great North lands to seek the Pole and to make record. True, the glory that goes with such records sometimes tempts us to forget the real object of our expedition, but



Perkins & Sheldon, 1129 O St.

LADIES' HEALTH SHOES

with cork soles and heavy grade Dongola kid, with medium round toes, are just the thing to keep you from catching cold during the coming winter. Of course, "there are others" and we have them from A to Z in every shape, weight and style, and all of the best manufacture, and up to date in every particular

the real object is to explore the unknown regions of the earth for the promotion of science. It is to learn for humanity the character of the country that lies in the farthest North. The finding of the Pole does not matter so much. Some day it will be found, and that will satisfy the popular desire to reach the mysterious Pole. Explorations however, will go on. I think some one will reach the Pole soon, perhaps in the present century—I hope so, at least. I should not be surprised if the American flag were the first to float from the Pole. Next to my own flag I should choose yours. There has always been a feeling of sympathy between America and Norway. I think it is a sympathy of old. I think it began when the Norwegians discovered America, for it was they who first set foot on these shores, and they were received with open arms. They were not strong enough to claim it, however—the Indians were too plentiful for them."

I do not suppose the immense crowd of people who went to the Carnegie music hall that night cared particularly for the scientific results of his explorations as they cared to see the man himself, the man who has cut in two the distance between the unknown and the known, who has known the "most disastrous chances of moving accident by flood and field."

For centuries the North Pole has been a standing challenge to adventurous blood. It has been to modern knighthood what the man who pushes his way into the ice-bound mystery of the Polar sea further than any man before him has done is a world hero. That is a kind of achievement which, like military achievement, is comprehensible to every man. To appreciate it requires no knowledge of science or feeling for art, no technical discriminations as in the case of an artistic masterpiece or a scientific discovery. It bespeaks the primitive virtues of hardihood, the power of the strong arm, which strikes an answering chord in the breast alike of the savant and the savage. After all, there is nothing quite like it, that power of the strong arm. It is the glory of Caesar and Napoleon. Nansen may be honored by a few universities because of his scientific discoveries, but to the people at large he is a hero because he reached the 86th parallel. Much of this talk about the scientific value of such explorations is all nonsense, invented out of consideration for the feelings of the Philistine, who can never accept the poet or the painter, or the actor as such, but must measure them by a material standard. It is in the same spirit that we make practical excuses for art to our stolid friends. Nansen never turned the prow of the Fram northward for practical purposes. He said so plainly in his peroration. He went because he was possessed of an old unrest, the Odyssey fever; because there sang in his blood that siren voice that is forever wooing us away from the life of hotels and theatres and electric lights, whispering to us of a larger liberty, of meeting Nature once more breast to breast, coping

ing with her hand to hand, of a life that would be life indeed. Perhaps, too, in this man there awoke the unstained blood of Viking voyagers, centuries dead.

"De must go go go
away from here,
On the other side the
world he's over-duc;
'Send' the road is
clear before you
When the old spring-fret
comes o'er you,
And the Red Gods
call to you."

In appearance Fridtjof Nansen is very much like hundreds of well set-up Norsemen you will find the world over. They were always such wanderers, those Norsemen. They have not changed much since the days when Eric the Bold turned his warship toward Iceland. You will find Nansen's kind within a hundred miles of Lincoln. They are scattered all over those vast midland plains populated by the peasantry of Europe. I have passed some of my days among them. He has the prominent cheek bone, fair ruddy skin, and yellow hair of his people. The commanding features of his face are his masterful mouth, high forehead, and his eyes that are as deep and blue as the water between the ice fissures. His hair stands up all over his head, scorning the sedative influence of the brush, just like that of hundreds of Norwegians down in Webster County, and he has the powerful shoulders of a big Norseman I used to watch stack straw out on the Divide last summer.

He spoke English well, but with considerable hesitation and with that unmistakable Norse accent, so like that of a dozen Eric Ericsons and Olaf Olesons I know that for a moment a desperate homesickness came over me and I bethought me of an old waltz tune that the Norsemen used to play at their dances.

He has, too, their old tricks of telling the most startling things in the most naively calm and phlegmatic manner. I imagine that the people who went to hear thrilling description and blood-curdling word pictures went away disappointed. After the practitioners of yellow journalism have ransacked the dictionary to find adjectives glaring enough to paint his adventures, it was almost incredible that the man who had actually done all these things should speak of them with such epic simplicity. A committeeman making his official report could not have been more terse and direct. I have heard gentlemen describe a fishing trip much more dramatically. There was something in his terseness and economy of verbiage that recalled the Commentaries of Caesar. When he expanded at all it was on the beauties of the polar night or something quite as impersonal. His own deeds of daring he mentioned casually. His terrible swim in the Arctic waters after the drifting boats,