

# The Passing Show.

WILLA CATHER.

An open letter to Nat C. Goodwin. My Dear Goodwin: So averse are you to any appearance of dignity that I can never bring myself to prefix a formal "Mr." to your name. There are, indeed, many of your critics who find fault with your irrepressible levity and censure you accordingly. Mr. Elwyn Barron, a very gifted writer on matters pertaining to your profession, once impatiently complained that you did not take either your art or yourself seriously enough. After a life spent so largely among player folks, I should think that he would have found that a unique and somewhat refreshing failing. For whatever the faults of your fellows may be, a light regard for themselves or their work is seldom one of them.

I have no doubt that the most graceless novice who ever played minor parts in your company could give you instruction in the matter of taking yourself seriously. Yet I believe that much of the pleasure we derive from your acting is due to the fact that you have not followed the advice of your critics on this point. We both know only too well the madness which seizes ladies and gentlemen of your profession when once they begin to "take themselves seriously." That particular kind of self esteem is in its effects not unlike the magic brew of Robin Goodfellow in its effects; having drunk of it asses straightway be-think themselves heroes, matrons disport themselves in ingenue parts, and soubrettes go a-starring as the unhappy daughter of the Capulets.

But critics have done their worst with you in vain. With all their subtle flatteries and alluring promises for the future, they have never been able to freeze your erratic humor into pretentious gravity, or to inveigle you into cultivating ideals—a species of agriculture more pernicious to gentlemen of your profession than the faithful trilogy that honest Martin Luther loved. In short, you have not become pompous and insincere in the abortive effort to be "creative." In the face of protests, pleading and indignant, you have continued to play the one part for which you are fitted by nature. You have put upon the stage for us the common young man; not a hero, nor a man set upon by fate and submerged in woe, but "one of the boys;" a young man with the common perplexities, the common faults, the common tastes and the common desires; a fellow whom every man in your audience meets at the club and whom every woman has scolded and made much of.

Although your work owes some of its happiest qualities to the fact that you are never sentimental, you are by no means without a certain vein of sentiment. It is not at all the sentiment which accompanies a Spenserian fancy, and which turns most of the prose of life into poetry, but rather that wholesome, unexaggerated sentiment which lives in many a good fellow's heart and which is responsible for our finding photographs and withered violets in the desk drawers of the most circumspect young men.

I remember once having seen you strike a man who had just kicked a dog, and it affected me as much as your best work on the stage does. The combat degenerated into a common street scuffle and was quelled by the blue-coated officer of the law, and this

too, was unfortunately characteristic of you. This strange alloy is ever present in your work. Yet I never see you in your best moments behind the footlights, moments in which the thorough good-fellowship in you shines through, that I do not say: "That is why he struck the fellow who kicked the dog!"

Critics have railed at you for your lack of versatility and have said that you sacrifice your real gifts to certain taking personal mannerisms. They have said that you might even do great things in the legitimate drama if you would but abandon your whimsical smile and forego the brushing of your "few thin locks" and the imbibing of cocktails upon the stage.

Frankly, my dear fellow, I do not believe them. To do anything worth while in the legitimate drama, a man must have a certain passion for intellectual problems, a taste for fine shades of interpretation, a consecration of purpose which you do not possess, and I trust, will ever be wise enough not to affect.

I sincerely hope that you will never be persuaded by your enthusiastic admirers to attempt the comedies of Shakspeare. You have neither the training nor the taste for them. Yet I dare say that of all the players on our stage today, personally, the Master would have fancied you. He was no anchorite himself, and he wrote not only of Hamlets and Ferdinand, but fondly enough of Touchstone and Falstaff and wild Prince Hal. If, some spring night when the season is well over and the play actors are drifting back to town from the distant provinces, from Seattle and Helena and Spokane and Kansas City, if then he could drop in at the "Players" for an hour, I fancy that of all your fellows, it is you he would chose to drink a glass with. Or if you could have stepped into the Mermaid tavern three hundred years ago, when Ben Johnson and Dick Burbage and Shakspeare and perhaps Pembroke, his "sweetest self," were about their table. I think that out of those grave eyes of his the Master would have looked at you and measured you smiled and held out his hand.

The legitimate, Mr. Goodwin, is not for you. You must be content to lie on the sunny side of the apple tree. You are a prince of good fellows, and you must let it go at that. We smile with you, but when we have tears to shed we must shed them with other men. We go to see you for just what you are; Nat C. Goodwin, and I do not see why we may not quite as properly like an actor for his personality as an author for his style. At any rate we like you for what you are; not for what you might be; something of a scrape grace, a good deal of a vagabond, and just enough of an artist to redeem your qualities. You are incorrigible, sir, and I for one like you the more for it.

PITTSBURG, PA.

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Edith—I told Mr. Converse the other night that I resembled him in one respect.

Clare—What was that?

"That I always enjoyed hearing him talk."

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#### THE PARTING LOVERS.

Good night, sweetheart,  
it can't be ten, I know;  
I wish that clock  
was just a trifle slow!  
I do not see how it can  
have the face  
To rush the hours at  
such a rapid pace.  
Full well I know  
ten minutes have not blown  
Since it struck nine.  
good night, my love, my own.  
"Good night, Charlie."

Oh! yes! Last night while  
going down Broadway,  
Whom do you think I met?  
Dick Gray!  
Just home from Europe;  
you should see him walk.  
'T would make a mummy laugh  
to hear him talk.  
He's captivating with  
his London air!  
A last good night my love,  
my jewell rare.  
"Good night, Charlie."

Oh! Katie! Wait dear,  
I forgot to tell  
You something. Let me think—  
that's funny: well,  
It's gone, and in a moment  
so am I—  
My darling, how I hate  
to say good bye.  
Some fellows would  
much later stay, I know,  
But ten your mother says,  
so I will go  
"Good night, Charlie."

Oh! Katie dear,  
is't it too much trouble, think  
To get a match?  
I could not sleep a wink  
Without my smoke.  
It is a lovely night,  
So clear and sweet,  
and just as bright  
As day. Well, I must  
tear myself away.  
Thanks, dear, good night  
once more I'll say.  
"Good night, Charlie."

Some time, bewitching Kate  
ah, sometime time, sweet,  
"Good bye" shall we  
consider obsolete.  
No more will clocks  
strike terror to my heart,  
And in exultant tones  
bid me depart.  
But now, like  
Cinderella at the ball  
I fly from happiness.  
Good night my all.  
"Good night, Charlie."

Oh! dear! How stupid of me!  
There's my cane.  
I must come back and get it.  
Should it rain  
Tomorrow I will come  
and let you know  
About the picnic;  
if not we'll go.  
Hark! Catch me ere  
I fall Oh! What a shock!  
It strikes again. Good night.  
Confound that clock!  
"Good night, Charlie."  
—Mary Day Harris.

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