

THE PASSING SHOW

WILLA CATHER

The Pittsburg Grand Opera season, the last engagement of the Metropolitan opera company before it disbanded and severally departed for Europe, was something long to be remembered. It was the closing of the most glorious opera season America has ever seen, and this dirty, gloomy, city arrayed itself in dress coats and imported toilettes and just got up and did itself proud in honor of the event. Pittsburg is noted for taking itself seriously, and it is frantically busy seven days out of the week the whole year round, but when it decides to take a holiday, it does it with a vengeance, as the great financial success of the opera season here proved to Mr. Maurice Grau, to whose stony heart only dollars speak.

Lohengrin, with the following cast, was the opera selected for the opening night:

Elsa von Brabant,.....Mme. Nordica
Ortrud,.....Mme. Schumann-Heink
Heinrich, duetecher

.....M. Edouard de Reezke
Friedrich von Telramund,

.....Mr. David Bispham
Der Heerfuhrer des Koenigs,

.....Mr. Lempriere Pringle
und

Lohengrin,.....M. Jean de Reezke
Conductor, Herr Schalk.

Certainly all the living talent of the world could not furnish a better cast. It was Jean de Reezke's sole appearance and it took much tact and more gold to woo that haughty tenor so far from the coast. As for the performance, no company can uniformly give performances of such merit, it was one of those fortunate things that happens only occasionally. Madame Nordica told me in the afternoon when she was running over the score at her hotel that she had a premonition that the night would be a triumphant one. Perhaps she thought so because she found herself in unusually good voice, but she was not mistaken. It was not the first time I had had the pleasure of hearing her Elsa, but it was the first time I ever heard her sing it so well. She is less attractive physically this season than I have ever seen her, for she happens to be unparadonably stout. She has the most mercurial averdupois I know of, one winter she is almost slender, the next, she is like a matronly dowager. As G. Bernard Shaw says, "you never can tell." But after all she is a mere sylph beside Schumann. I never saw her give herself out to her audience as she did that night. She is becoming a proficient actress, that determined woman from Maine with the strong chin and big, firm hands, like a man's. It is difficult for her to act, but her whole life has been one long, laborious vanquishing of difficulties. Her very entrance in the first act gives you confidence in her. This is no timid, simpering Elsa. She comes in regally, confident, fearlessly, unstained by that serene hope in a mystic deliverance. When the herald calls for her defender, she awaits him with perfect assurance. Not until the call has been given the third time does she begin to doubt, and even then, when she rises from her knees at the close of her prayer, her face is shining with the fullness of her faith. And then he came, the great Jean, the deliverer, the greatest tenor and one of the greatest actors of his time. He was past fifty when I heard him in Chicago four years ago, yet he stood there in the swan-boat the radiant incarnation of youth and chivalry, the dream-knight of all dreams. And his entrance does what the entrance of a great artist always does, it imparted

convincing reality to everything and completed the illusion of the theatre. The swan which drew this splendid figure in silver armour was a real swan, the painted river flowed along like any other river, there was a wind playing in the rusbes, and there was a real Mount Monsalvat somewhere in the world, for this man could only have come from that place "which is bright forever." At the first note of the song to the swan, one felt that it was Jean indeed, and at the close of his long and arduous season his voice was fresh, unworn, exquisitely flexible, and his manner of using it is as wonderful as ever, when all is said, it is in his vocalization that de Reezke is unparalleled. Had he next to no voice at all, like the superb Maurel who can sing with a completely worn-out organ, he would still be a consummate artist. His voice is indeed a thing of beauty, but his method of using it is a joy forever. It is the method that makes the artist. The organ itself is purely accidental, and like most of the gifts of God is frequently ill bestowed, but the use of it that is where the cerebral tissue comes in, and energy and taste and ambition and superhuman industry and all that makes a man. Here is a barytone who has made himself the prince of tenors, who arranges every phrase as a painter lays on his colors, who produces every tone in his brain as well as in his throat, who makes tone but the garment of the mind as flesh is the garment of the soul, who makes of his voice an instrument under perfect control and plays upon it what he wills. The mechanical perfection of the registration, the breathing and placing, they are the achievements of a life-time of endeavor and are the joy of all young artists. But of the emotional resources of this voice, of its perfect adaption to every shade and degree of every passion, of its freshness and sweetness and bloom, its poetic quality blended with robust virility, what shall be said? The language has been beggared of adjectives to describe it, yet none of them reach it. Someone has called his singing of the Swan song "the milk and honey of music." Certainly he is the only tenor we have today whose tenderness is wholly without effeminacy, or whose voice can rise clear, melodious and true, to the full measure of tragedy, and then there is, undeniably, a deep sentimental quality, that baffling minor tings that is in the acting of Modjeska and the music of Chopin. Perhaps it is only the cry of unhappy Poland, for which we have no name, a sort of echo that Polish mothers sang.

When the swan had gone and Lohengrin turned to Elsa there seemed nothing abrupt or hasty about his wooing. It was the day of the Arthurian legends come back again, when the knight came with his nobility stamped upon his face, and the maiden's helplessness was her strength. And this Elsa and this Lohengrin have sung that duet so often that their very voices seem to woo each other. When De Reezke sings "On the king of kings I call," he looks King Arthur indeed, and one can well believe that in the days of knight-hood there was a Grail indeed.

It is that wonderful artist Mme. Schumann-Heink who dominates the second act. Bispham's Frederick is wonderfully dramatic, but this Ortrud was like none ever seen before. This Schumann-Heink, with her peasant face and her absurd dumpy little figure and short arms simply has unlimited power. She sings down everything before her. She makes you forget that she is not beautiful, and Heavens! what a triumph a woman achieves when she does that. Her scornful taunts at her lover's cowardice and

weakness, her impassioned appeal to Elsa, her insatiable hatred, her crafty poisoning of that guileless maiden's mind, are all very triumphs of art. She so completely subordinates Nordica in that act that there can be no question that, within her limitations, she is the greater artist of the two. The second act was not, on this occasion, Nordica's best. In her solo "Ye wandering breeze" on the balcony, one noticed that old inflexibility, that hardness of tone that in her younger days used so often to detract from the effectiveness of her singing.

The third act, when de Reezke sings Lohengrin, is something never to be forgotten. The music of that nuptial duet is probably the most poetic Wagner ever wrote, and certainly the man who sang it has a poet's soul shut up in his throat. When he led Elsa to the window, I assure you he brought the stillness and beauty of the summer night into the hot air of the play house. I wish that every analytical student of literature, every misguided person who counts the false rhymes in Spencer and exultantly tears Browning's figures to pieces, or kills a flower to find its name, could have heard him sing that tender remonstrance:

"Dost thou breathe the incense of the flowers,
Bearing a tide of deep, mysterious joy?
And would'st know whence this rapture showers?
Ask not, O love, lest thou the charm destroy!"

It was like some divine, compassionate wisdom pleading with the narrow vision and petty pride of fretful pedantry. But poor, dull Elsa was a German lady of a philosophical bent of mind and she wanted a name for everything and could not believe in a joy which she could not analyse. So gently he entreated her, so fair the moonlight was, so sweet the night, so lovely all the world, yet poor practical Elsa could only cry "The name, give me the name!" Well, she got it, and so do the people who construct systems for measuring the value of poetry, but at what a cost! They get the name, and perhaps acquire vast erudition, but they lose the knight, and Mount Monsalvat, and the bright temple of the Grail and all the rest of it. I have heard a good many arguments against the methods of the people who count the poetic words in Tennyson, but I never heard one so powerful or so beautiful as that which Jean de Reezke sang that night.

I was talking with Mme. Nordica about Elsa's particular variety of stupidity after the performance, when she was getting from the airy draperies affected in Brabant into a Paris street dress. "Yes," she said, "that is in all Wagner, that too much analysis destroys; that, and the opportunity of the moment. For the gods there is Walhalla and forever and a day, but for mortals there is only the moment, and that is dying even while it is being born."

Leave Chicago every Thursday via Colorado and Scenic Route to San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Southern Route leaves Chicago every Tuesday via Kansas City, Ft. Worth and El Paso to Los Angeles.

These Excursions Cars are attached to Fast Passenger trains and their popularity is evidence that we offer the best.

Accompany these excursion and save money for the lowest rate tickets are available in these popular Pullman Tourist cars.

THE COURIER is for sale at all leading newsstands. Subscription price for one year is \$1. Phone 384.

CLUBS.

[LOUISA L. RICKETTS.]

The following are the officers of the General Federation of Women's clubs:
President—Mrs. Rebecca D. Lowe
Atlanta, Ga.

Vice President—Mrs. Sarah S. Platt,
Denver, Colo.

Recording Secretary—Mrs. Emma A. Fox,
Detroit, Mich.

Corresponding Secretary—Mrs. George W. Kendrick,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Treasurer, Mrs. Phillip N. Moore,
St. Louis, Mo.

Auditor—Mrs. C. P. Barnes,
Louisville, Ky.

State Chairman—Mrs. Louisa L. Ricketts,
Lincoln, Nebr.

Officers of the State Federation of Women's clubs;

President—Mrs. S. C. Langworthy,
Seward.

Vice President—Mrs. Anna L. Apperson,
Tecumseh.

Recording Secretary—Mrs. F. H. Sackott,
Weeping Water.

Corresponding Secretary—Mrs. D. G. McKillip,
Seward.

Treasurer—Mrs. H. F. Doane,
Crete,
Librarian—Mrs. G. M. Lambertson,
Lincoln.

Mrs. A. B. Fuller, Auditor, Ashland.

So many requests for information of just what the Worcester Club of Massachusetts did say, in regard to restricting membership in the General Federation have come to this department that we herewith repeat verbatim the action taken by that club. It sent the following suggestions:

To the Chairman of Correspondence of Massachusetts for the G. F. W.'s Clubs—Dear Madame: The Worcester Woman's Club sends greeting and begs leave to submit the following suggestions:

In view of the fact that the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, of which our club is an individual member, has grown to such an immense size as to make it difficult to conduct business necessary to the organization, in a proper manner, under the present system of representation, we feel that a radical change in the whole system of federation organization is imperatively demanded, and, to facilitate such change, would suggest—

First—That the chairman of correspondence for Massachusetts take steps to ascertain the wishes of all of the clubs of the state now belonging to the General Federation in regard to changing the representation in the General Federation from that of individual clubs to that of representatives from state federations.

Second—That the chairman of correspondence for Massachusetts communicate with the chairman of other states for the purpose of ascertaining the wishes of the clubs in their respective states upon the same question.

Third—That the chairman of correspondence recommend to the General Federation to so change its constitution that the General Federation shall be composed of representatives from state federations only, with the exception of such national or foreign organizations, as may now belong to the General Federation, and also federated clubs in states wherein no state federations now exist, in which case special provision should be made.

The Worcester Woman's Club hereby declares its readiness to relinquish its individual membership in the General Federation whenever such action shall facilitate the reorganization of that body so that it shall be composed of representatives from state federations only."

Very naturally these suggestions have