

**THE PASSING SHOW**  
WILLA CATHER

TO LILLIAN NORDICA.

MY VALIANT COUNTRYWOMAN:

I will acknowledge at the outset that your career has always interested me more than your art. Had you limited your ambition to a church choir, appearing occasionally in a limited oratorio repertoire, as many other women quite as talented as yourself have done, there would be little in you to marvel at. Had you, on the other hand, chosen an easy and remunerative career abroad, like your compatriot, Mlle. Sanderson, you would have insured a wiser form of notoriety, would have appealed more strongly to the vulgar imagination, and would have encountered, I think, but few reproaches. It is your taste for difficulties that has always interested me. I think some strain of the zeal of the campmeeting exhorter, John Allen, your grandfather, must prompt in you that Puritanic tendency to consciously master whatsoever is difficult in the world. The most remarkable thing about you is that you should have chosen the career you have. Having once seriously set out to be a singer, I fancy it was but natural that the grand-daughter of John Allen should be a good one, and that whatsoever her hand found to do, she should do with her might.

You were born at Farmington, Maine; a name culpably easy of pronunciation for the birthplace of a singer. In early life you had the still greater misfortune to remove to Iowa; Patagonia would have been more auspicious. Your youth was passed among people bitterly prejudiced to the theater and indifferent to music of the better sort. It was a handicap that you ran with fortune from the outset. During the earlier part of your career you were persistently dogged by misfortunes, your connection with Mr. Gilmore's European fiasco being not the least among them. But you were abundantly endowed with that peculiarly practical and aggressive form of courage in America termed "grit." I believe there is no synonym for the word in any other language, and certainly the women of no other nation possess that quality so largely. It is not always an attractive quality in woman, but it is invaluable to ambition.

When you made your debut in opera, you had studied indefatigably and your musical education was unusually broad and comprehensive. Your memory has always been excellent, and you were able to sing a large repertoire at an hour's notice. But your inborn inaptitude for dramatic expression, your Puritanic aversion for emotional display, clung to you, fettering you like heavy armor. It was not until you sang at Beyreuth, when you were carried beyond yourself by the new possibilities opening before you, by the whole associations of the place, the flattering companionship of great artists, intoxicated by your own success, stimulated by the music itself as by a draught of Rhine wine, that you began to learn that hardest of lessons for American women; to let yourself go, in the argot of the green room, abandon, and that, my valiant countrywoman, is the only lesson you have never learned thoroughly; the easy thing, which is not a matter of labor, or sleepless nights, or incessant practice, but of a look, a touch, a sigh. But here that difficulty-defying brain was put at a loss; that iron will, trained so long to stubborn opposition in an unequal contest, refused to soften. Far from relaxing, you girded yourself up for a new assault, only to find that one thing, at least, is not to be got by conscientious endeavors, though it be the property of many a vagabond who sleeps in the sun.

I remember hearing you sing *Cavaleria Rusticana* in the West, shortly after it was first produced in this country. Not only was it impossible to conceive you as Santuzza, but as having any sympathy for or understanding of her. The music you sang remarkably well, but your indifference to the character was obvious, and to consider you seriously in the part seemed like offering an insult to a well bred American woman. Passional crimes are not rife among the pine forests of Maine, nor are they encouraged even in Iowa. You have lived in many countries and have studied the language and manners of many peoples; intellectually you are free from prejudice. But sentiment is a thing inborn; it forms before the parietal bones have closed, is made up of the first lights and shadows and echoes of the great world that comes to us across the great threshold upon which we play, and education cannot change it. To your credit, you have remained an American woman, and it were easier to melt the stony hills of Maine than the proud marble of your body, easier to teach the pines a sensuous melody than the splendid Amazon warrior, full armed and girded for the fray.

Even since you returned to us with the hall-mark of Beyreuth, we, your own people, have done you scant justice. Were you a Deutch frau of mountainous physique, or a raw-boned Russian giantess, or a frowsy-haired Hungarian Jewess, no doubt you would be very much the fashion. But since you are a gifted gentlewoman of our own blood, with the fresh color and frank eyes that bespeak such fine things of your country, we are prone to neglect you and take your merits for granted. We find the gypsies who consume black liqueurs and spoil their complexions with tobacco more interesting.

The manner in which you have held your own in the Metropolitan Opera Company should be a source of pride to your countrymen. With the exception of Mme. Eames you are the only American woman who has made herself indispensable to that heterogeneous organization. In that motley assemblage of bohemians, ex-cab drivers, ex-innkeepers, swarthy beings drummed up from every corner of Europe, speaking every gibberish and dialect, you have maintained your dignity and ours in a way that makes one long to cry, "A health to the native born!" Great artists, all of them, these foreign folk, of the aristocracy of genius, whatever their pedigree, of a blood more royal than that of princes, but people of strange manners and foreign sympathies and, withal, exceedingly bigoted. The overwhelming importance of these personages has never abashed you. What you know, you know, though you came from Maine, and you have made even the Poles—"Alas," said Cherbulez, "this sad world, full of accidents and Poles!"—feel the righteous indignation of the Puritan. As artists, you have given these personages their due, but in your personal and professional relations with them you have exacted courtesy, respect and fair dealing, and have carried your colors right gallantly, unawed by titles and splendors and the favors of kings. In much the same spirit did our great Franklin, in his con-alkia cap, walk unperturbed through the halls of the Tuilleries, conversing confidently with savants and princes, the equal of any of them; watching with keen interest the follies of the bewigged and bejeweled gentlemen about him, preserving himself, the simple, homely manne's and severe, strenuous life of a newer world, washed clean by the blue sea water.

Whatever of international reputation you have acquired, you have won without servility, by courageous endeavor and unceasing effort. You have made the masterful New England character, come down to us no whit weakened from the days of Winthrop and Roger Will-

iams, felt and respected abroad. Of this fine force of character in you, there can be no doubt. It is a softer and more elusive quality that we sometimes miss in you, the thing which, in the makeshift of our linguistic poverty, we vaguely designate as temperament. And I fear, my valiant countrywoman, that the two seldom thrive together. Even in your voice itself, that powerful and splendid organ, I miss a certain life-giving quality; yes, even in those, round, full, unclouded tones, tones of silver, shaken from your throat as lightly as the water drops from a sea bird's wing, when it flies upward in the golden dawn. In them, to me, there is always a certain unyielding quality; scarcely metallic, but white and cold rather, like the glitter of the diamonds in your tiara. Ah! if you would sometimes let your heart go out with that all-conquering voice! if you would but sometimes be a woman!

Yours has been an admirable career, fair kinswoman; you have matched the better traits of your own people against the world, and we have no right to complain, since you have shown us all our worthiest virtues in so fair a setting. Yet genius does not always consort with industry and uprightness; some times with idleness and folly rather. It is because you climb so well that you have never tried to fly. You plan, you execute, you dare, but I think you never dream. You have mastered much, but I think nothing has ever mastered you. Music has become an exact science, and you have made that science your own.

Yet, forget it not, music first came to us many a century ago, before we had concerned ourselves with science, when we were but creatures of desire and before we had quite parted with our hairy coats, indeed; and that it comes to us as a religious chant and a love song. I believe that through all its evolutions it should always express those two cardinal needs of humanity, carrying the echo of those yearnings which first broke the silence of the world.

I am not yet convinced that, were the taste of the public more advanced, you would not do well to limit yourself to the concert stage. There is the dominion of pure tone, there less is demanded of phrasing than in opera, and the intrinsic beauties of the voice are judged in the light of their own splendor.

In opera, I prefer you in Wagnerian solos: warrior maidens, clothed in chastity and iron; women of the white robe and the bright sword, helpers of men and councillors of gods. Elsa, Brunhilda, Elizabeth—Isolda? Ah, no! Never was the sting of the potion on your lips, never have the waves that lash so madly on the Irish coast told you the reason of their fury, nor of how many centuries they have quickened to the mystic wooing of the moon, able to escape it never.

American prima donnas of the future will look back upon your memory with pride and gratitude. You seem to me to embody all that is best in American womanhood. I think if anywhere on the continent, among the thousands of strange faces that pass one, I chanced to see yours, I should joyfully know under what sky to place it. About you there seems always something suggestive of a new hope in the world, not to be encountered in tired Europe; something altogether wholesome and invigorating like the clean smell of the pine woods, mingled with the fresh sea breeze. Something in your face, with its resolute chin, so powerfully modeled, bespeaking such potency for resistance and constancy—"resistance unto death," your grandfather would have said, recalls to me always the granite hills of the New England coast and the silent, enduring strength of its pioneers.

"Impecunious Davis," a new two-step march by Kerry Mills, the author of "Whistling Rufus," has all the catchy popularity of that favorite of orchestras.

**CLUBS.**

[LOUISA L. RICKETTS.]

CALENDAR OF NEBRASKA CLUBS.

- December.
- 16, Review and Art c., Leonardo da Vinci.....York
  - 16, Woman's c., House of Hanover.....Syracuse
  - 16, Pansy c., Stowe and Beecher.....Tecumseh
  - 16, Fin de Siecle c., Audubon, Agassiz and Stanley.....Seward
  - 16, Woman's c., Household Economics.....North Bend
  - 16, History and Art c., Religious and Political Condition of Germany, 814-911—Treaty of Verdun.....Seward
  - 18, Woman's c., Musical.....Lincoln
  - 18, Sorosis, Topics of the times, Coriolanus, Act V.....Stanton
  - 18, Woman's c., Parliamentary practice, Omaha
  - 19, Woman's c., An afternoon with books.....Fairbury
  - 19, Woman's c., French Conversation.....Omaha
  - 19, Woman's c., Current topics.....Omaha
  - 19, Century c., The Dutch colonies.....Lincoln
  - 19, Woman's c., German history.....Lincoln
  - 19, Sorosis, Our public Schools.....Lincoln
  - 19, Sorosis, Ethics and philosophy.....Lincoln
  - 19, History and Art c., The Cabal Ministry.....Albion
  - 20, Mary Barnes Literary c., Inter-Colonial Wars.....Fullerton
  - 20, Woman's c., Oratory.....Omaha
  - 21, Woman's c., Art.....Omaha
  - 21, Woman's c., Education.....Omaha
  - 22, Hall in the Grove, Art.....Lincoln
  - 22, Self Culture c., Christmas.....St. Paul
  - 22, Woman's c., Christmas.....Plattsmouth
  - 23, XIX Century c., Painting in the Netherlands, Monroe Doctrine.....Seward
  - 23, Woman's c., Holiday Adjournment.....North Bend
  - 23, Fin de Siecle c., American humorists, and Christmas in Other Land.....Seward
  - 23, Zetetic c., Growth of Literature from 1850-1890. Pronunciation test.....Weeping Water

OFFICERS OF N. F. W. C., 1899 & 1900.  
Pres., Mrs. Anna L. Apperson, Tecumseh.  
V. P., Mrs. Ida W. Blair, Wayne.  
Cor. Sec., Mrs. Virginia D. Arup, Tecumseh.  
Rec. Sec., Miss Mary Hill, York.  
Treas., Mrs. H. F. Doane, Crete.  
Librarian, Mrs. G. M. Lamberton, Lincoln.  
Auditor, Mrs. E. J. Hainer, Aurora.

The Omaha club dispensed with a program last Monday, in order that it might have ample time to discuss the question of questions, "Shall the G. F. W. C. be Reorganized?" The matter was presented by a committee consisting of Mrs. Lillian R. Harford, Mrs. Lowrie, Mrs. Andrews, Mrs. Heller and Mrs. Ford, the chairman. It was stated that the committee had sought light, not only from the Club Woman and The Courier, the respective official organs of the general and state federations, but from women of long experience in the



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