

NOTES

Caruso

There was only one Caruso, as there was only one Shakspeare and one Dante. A few weeks ago the news came that the golden voice was silent for ever and the golden heart had ceased to beat. We all knew that the great singer was a consummate artist, but it was only in the white light that death threw upon him that the world came to learn what a big-hearted, kindly gentleman this illustrious son of Italy was. He had the sunny, lovable nature of a child; he received colossal rewards for his songs, but his generosity was also colossal. Not only his fellow-artists and those who had business dealings with him, but also the public loved him; and upon all, especially upon the poorer Italians of New York, a dark cloud of sorrow fell at the news of his death. Then voice upon voice was raised in wonderful tributes to his greatness as an artist, to his loving-kindness, to his personal charm; and only then did the outside world realise how little it had known of the inner heart of the tenor whose voice was the delight of millions.

When the News Reached New York

Here is an extract from an American paper which tells us what a sensation his death produced in the busy streets of New York:

Barefooted urchins, deserting the water-flooded gutters where a fleet of cigar-box boats was sailing, spread the report up and down the streets.

Fruit-vendors left their stands, merchants forgot their customers, and joined the old and the young in a procession to the tenement where the lone paper had already been torn to pieces by the anxious people.

Old women, with skirts knee-high, paddled through the pools of water in the street to two big rubber-coated Irish cops who stood under a protecting awning at Sullivan and Prince Streets.

"Is Caruso dead?" they asked the two big coppers, who have come to be accepted as the official bureau of information in the settlement.

"That's what the papers say," they were told.

Then the tears came.

"Better wait a while. Maybe it's just a report," the coppers said, and the old women took new heart. They went back to the hallways of the tenement, where they stood in anxious groups, or up to the top floors, where they leaned out of the windows, waiting to hear the news.

When the streets were swarmed with a regiment of newsmen bawling "Extra!" in tones that echoed off the buildings, hope vanished, and Little Italy turned itself over to mourning.

The newsboys sold out without moving a step. The old folks of the settlement, to whom English meant nothing, bought papers and had the news interpreted to them by the youngsters.

They expressed themselves in Italian wails. They crossed themselves, said a prayer for the dead, and then trudged home through the water.

In Tony Pizzard's pool-room on Houston Street the youths and the old men gathered.

"The one grand Italian is gone. Great as Christopher Columbus, greater than all others," mourned the old weather-beaten fruit-dealer from the corner.

"It's good he die in Italy if he havva to die. He belong to Italy," mourned another.

Others recounted, with a glisten of the eyes through restrained tears, of the many times that the great Caruso had visited Little Italy, how the baskets had come to the poor and the sick around Christmas time from the great Caruso, how little Pietro Cagna, the singing bootblack on Sullivan Street, had been sent to Italy by the great Caruso to learn to be a great tenor.

His Charity

The following extract is eloquent of the kindness and charity of the great singer:

At the last performance Mr. Caruso gave before Christmas he would play Santa Claus. Two years ago he filled a big soup-plate with five-dollar, ten-dollar, and twenty-dollar gold pieces, and between the acts and after the performance he walked around, giving them to everybody he passed. He stopped the ballet-girls on the stage and the stage-hands, and gave them his presents. Finally, when he saw that he could not get around, he called in an assistant Santa, his secretary, Mr. Zirato, who helped him. We used to receive all sorts of mementoes from him—scarf-pins, watches, pens.

Once a member of the company died and left his family in hard straits. Caruso saw the contribution-list that was to be circulated to help them and signed it first of all for 500 dollars. Then the rest of us came along with our twenty, thirty, and fifty. That was always the way. He was first in anything charitable. A member of the staff once started to purchase some property, but did not have the money to complete the transaction. Somehow Caruso must have heard of it. He called the man into his dressing-room and lent him the amount without further parley.

The telephone girl whom Caruso has well-nigh immortalised with a cartoon in his book, sits just inside the stage door of the house, and all the artists pass her as they come in. Caruso was especially entertained by her laugh. He would always come prepared to greet her with his best comical expression so as to produce her finest laughter. Finally, one of her performances pleased him so much that the next day he presented her with a new spring bonnet. A bonnet in exchange for a laugh! Why not, if it pleased him to hear her?

The Artist

In the following appreciation, G. Huneker gives us his opinion on Caruso's place among the master singers of the world:

"Enrico Caruso is dead. There have been and will be other tenors, yet for this generation his memory is something sacred and apart. It is doubtful if the Metropolitan Opera-House will again echo such golden music as made by his throat—that is, doubtful in our time. When he first came here not two decades ago there was a rich fruitiness to his tones that evoked such disparate images as the sound of a French horn and a golden autumnal sunset. Always the word golden comes to the lips. Golden, with a thrilling human fibre. Not the finished vocal artist that he developed into; nevertheless, there was something indescribably fresh, luminous, and youthful in the singing of the early Caruso. I had heard him in London before he sang here, which, alas, was to be his last home. Veteran as I was, I could hardly trust my ears when he poured forth a golden stream of music, and with effortless art. It needed no critical clairvoyancy to predict that a star of the first magnitude had arisen in the firmament of art. That was in 1902, and since then this star grew in lustre and beauty till the day of his death. Caruso had not even then achieved his grand artistic climax. He was every a prodigious student.

"There will not be any critical dispute as to Caruso's place in the history of his art. Even in the brief span of life accorded the present writer Caruso looms formidably. Originally a lyric he ended as a heroic tenor. His vocal range was extraordinary. In his repertoire he demonstrated his catholicity. From Meyerbeer's 'Les Huguenots' to Flotow's 'Marta,' from 'Rigoletto' to 'Pagliacci,' there are few lyric works that he missed. 'La Forza del Destino' was revived for him by Mr. Gatti-Casazza, and he could squander his extraordinary art on such a trifle as Mascagni's 'Lodoletta.' But to all his undertakings he brought a refreshing sincerity and tonal beauty. It is not to be denied that he was happier in Italian than French music; his *Rhadames* outshone his *Faust*. Nevertheless, he overcame the seemingly insuperable difficulties of a foreign style and diction, and his *John of Leyden* in 'Le Prophete' and *Eleazer* in 'La Juive' rank among his greatest achievements, not to mention