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Newsletter—Literary Issue

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Edited by Bernice Slote

Twice a year literary issues of the Newsletter will present new Willa Cather material: reprints of some of Cather's early, hard-to-find, and still uncollected journalistic writings; early reviews, interviews, and notes about Cather's work; bibliographical information; and—from Cather readers—original brief notes, observations, explications, or short critical articles. (Submit manuscripts to CATHER NEWSLETTER, 201 Andrews Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508).

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Chautauqua Articles

In July 1894 Willa Cather wrote nine articles for the Lincoln *Evening News* on the Chautauqua Assembly then being held at Crete, Nebraska. This Chautauqua episode was described and a good portion of the articles quoted by Bernice Slote in an article, "Willa Cather Reports Chautauqua, 1894," in the Spring 1969 issue of *Prairie Schooner* (pp. 117-28), but only one entire piece by Willa Cather was reprinted. We now reprint three of the 1894 articles. All were signed "Willa Cather."

The picture is of the Crete Chautauqua (about 1890), courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society. The quotation which appears with it is from Willa Cather's *Evening News* article for July 10, 1894.



"At a Chautauqua the first stage of adoration is accomplished on the grass, the second in a hammock, but the third incarnation takes place in a boat. The Blue is not a pearly stream, nor are mosquitoes conducive to sentiment, yet many a craft laden with beauty and worshipful incense is rowed down the stream, like that which once sailed down the Cydnus."

THE FOURTH AT CRETE.

The Chautauqua Assembly Well Under
Way—A Large Attendance.

Crete, Neb., July 5.—(Special to The News.)—Enthusiasm is the only thing which will not get wet. This fact was amply demonstrated by the crowds of good-natured people who waded from the depot to the Chautauqua grounds Tuesday afternoon. Early in the afternoon all the cottages were either engaged or occupied, even the press building, the lawyers' building and the G. A. R. hall were rented and many who desired cottages were forced to be dwellers in tents. Until late in the night the tenters were busy driving tent poles and stretching damp canvas. All afternoon the cottagers were putting up window blinds and washing windows, hacks were coming to and from the grounds, and the voice of the baggageman was heard in the land plaintively inquiring if "anybody was shy any baggage over there."

The exercises began Tuesday evening. The first program was opened by a short address by Rev. Willard Scott of Chicago. The lecture platform was then occupied by Mr. Lorado Taft of the Chicago Art Institute, who spoke on modern French art and artists, profusely illustrating his lecture with stereopticon views. Mr. Taft thinks that art is more a national characteristic of the French than of any other people excepting the Japanese. He believed that the influence of French art is as great as itself, that it has awakened, inspired and given prodigally of its richness to all nations. His favorite among the modern French painters seem to be Millet, Corot and Lerolle. His admiration for Gerome and Bouguereau is conscientious and dutiful rather than spontaneous.

The morning of the Fourth brought crowds, sunshine and summer girls to the assembly grounds. The excursion trains brought loads of expectant humanity which was piled into those all-embracing Crete hacks, where one first learns what it means to come into contact with one's fellow man.

The first thing on the program was breakfast, and it was a good one. The table at the boarding house on the grounds is excellent this year. It is under the control of the W.C.A. of Lincoln and it is enough to make any Lincolnite enlarge and expand with pride to see how the good things from Lincoln balance the brains from Chicago.

The second number on the program was the lecture "Glimpses Into a Sculptor's Studio," by Mr. Lorado Taft. His talk was scarcely a lecture, but rather an explanation of some of the mechanical processes of sculpture. Mr. Taft did some very striking and rapid work in modelling and handled the clay in a workmanlike way.

The afternoon program opened with a prelude by Miss (Electa) Gifford. Miss Gifford sang several stirring patriotic selections and responded to an enthusiastic encore.

W. E. Andrews delivered an eloquent address upon the day and its meaning.

Frank Beard gave a Fourth of July talk which delighted and amused his audience, especially the juvenile portion of it. As a teller of a good story Mr. Beard is unrivaled.

The afternoon was then given up to hammocks, tennis and sylvan wanderings.

In the evening Miss Gifford sang again. How Miss Gifford manages to fill that vast barn of a hall so that every note is heard in every part of the building is the standing mystery, but she certainly does it, and entirely without agony and contortion of face and form which sopranos usually exhibit when they are trying to induce their voices to "carry." Miss Gifford's first selection, "The Holy City," was rendered with strength and feeling, but it was in her second selection that she stirred her audience into enthusiastic admiration. To say that her phrasing of "Robin Adair" was individual and original may sound paradoxical. Myself, I have always believed any originality in "Robin" impossible, in fact the whole song has always seemed to me impossible. But Miss Gifford sang it well enough to break down the prejudices of years and to turn a dislike of the song into a lively admiration for herself and it. Perhaps the secret of her beautiful rendering of the song was that she did not try to make it coquettish or "fetching" but was content to trust to its simplicity and plaintiveness for its effect. There are very few prima donnas nowadays who know how to be simple.

Mr. Taft lectured on Dutch and German painters, and again proved, much to his credit, that he is a modern of the moderns in taste and creed. Work and enthusiasm like Mr. Taft's make the artistic future of the west seem possible, and almost make me dream that it is near at hand, even at the door.

(July 5, 1894)

AT THE CHAUTAUQUA.

The News Correspondent Gives Bits of
Life at The Crete Assembly.

Dunning Hall is the place where the brains of the Crete Chautauqua are supposed to dwell. It is principally inhabited by those serene and high beings who furnish the dignity of the assembly and a very humble mortal is likely to feel a bit bashful among those who dwell on Parnassus. Dunning Hall is the most audible building it has ever been my good fortune to dwell in. It has quenched all my ambitions to visit whispering galleries and echo caverns. All through silent night one is conscious of the breathing of one's next door neighbor, and if one's neighbor happen to—well, to breathe not quite so gently, this consciousness becomes rather painful. People are packed in very closely at Dunning Hall. I doubt if parsons, painters, professors and prima donnas often get into such close proximity. On one side one hears the prima donna singing snatches of opera, in another little den an artist is expatiating on "technique," in another room a sociologist is arguing on socialism, and in another a clergyman is busy assisting the Lord to run the universe.

This reporter was neither zealous nor industrious enough to attend the 7 o'clock prayer meeting. That is one number on the day's program I leave to people whose wings are nearer germination than mine. The first lecture I arose early enough to hear was Dr. Joseph T. Duryea's lecture on "The Roman Empire." The main point of his talk this morning was that wealth was the Roman curse, that rich men composed the Roman senate and that rich men ruled Rome. Chautauqua lecturers are so generally men of one idea, and that frequently only half an idea, that it is restful to hear a man of Dr. Duryea's fertility of thought and ease of expression. He not only has ideas, but the language for

them. He has a peculiar way of saying one sentence that suggests pages, of drawing an analogy that explains and simplifies the whole idea of government. His lectures are neither fiery phillipics nor philosophical discourses, but they have the smoothness and eloquence of a balanced sympathy and trained reason.

Professor Bayard Holmes delivered the first of his lectures on sociology. Professor Holmes is glowing with enthusiasm and his lecture on the "Conscience of the State" was one of the most earnest lectures ever heard on the Chautauqua grounds. Some of his views are rather unconventional, and he spoke not as the Pharisees, but as "one having authority." While Professor Holmes is not exactly a voice crying in the wilderness like Professor Herron, he has ideas of his own and speaks them frankly and bravely.

The Music

Miss Gifford rises daily in favor. As she becomes more accustomed to the airy nature of the auditorium her voice grows even better than at first. Today she sang "Parla," a waltz song by Ardit, in a way that moved as well as pleased. In addition to her simplicity and individuality in her phrasing, Miss Gifford has some notes of remarkable sweetness, real bird notes that do not seem to be manufactured but to come of their own accord and to soar right up into sunshine. It would be worth while for all Lincoln to make a pilgrimage down to Crete this evening to hear Miss Gifford's recital. A singer of such talent and charm is not likely to be near Lincoln soon again.

Mrs. P. V. M. Raymond has organized her class in chorus work. About one hundred students are taking the work. There is some exceptionally good material in the chorus this year, and it will certainly be the strongest of the many strong choruses that Mrs. Raymond has conducted in Crete.

(July 6, 1894)

SUNDAY AT CRETE

Some Observations of a Lazy
Day,

The Crete Chautauqua

The Fountain of Thought That the Foghorn Tapped—Genius Has its Disadvantages—A Premature Orthodox Climax in the Midst of Prof. Kent's Lecture.

Lincoln's Galaxy of Beauty

Sunday is a lazy day, even at the Chautauqua. The fog horn which summons one to breakfast did not sound until half past seven yesterday, and very few people got to the table before eight. Every one, or almost every one, went to church, even the newspaper reporter. It paid, too. The music was divine and the reunion was a great one. There was enough good music to make one thoroughly religious before the reunion began.

A Chautauqua Dinner

After the services were over everyone went to dinner. Dinner at the W.C.A. dining hall has a good many attractions, but by far the most attractive things are the waiters. They are artistic, as well as useful, and gratify the aesthetic tastes as well as the gastronomic. It was charitable in Lincoln to export its whole galaxy of beauty to Crete to save starving humanity. No amateur opera or private theatricals ever contained so many pretty girls nor half so many good-natured girls. There is no doubt that the Chautauqua table service at least beats that of any hotel in the land.

You meet with all sorts and conditions of men at a Chautauqua dinner. Opposite you sits a gilded youth with his hair parted in the middle and a languishing air, who scorns to eat and seems to live upon the perfume and mirth that exhales from the adoring maidens about him.

On one side of you is a man with a large degree discussing something with a person of the most plebeian type. On the other side sits the little prima donna who seems to live on the fragrance of the sweet peas in the center of the table, for apparently she eats nothing. Tea, coffee, hot bread, cheese, pickles, cake, and pie, are it seems, forbidden to those who have high aspirations and high notes. After all there is one comfort about being a mortal of very common clay. It is one's own, to make mud pie if one wants to, whereas the warlike geniuses belong to the gods, and to the people and to art and to everybody but themselves. On the whole I think it is very comfortable not to be a genius. But if you chance to sit near one of these celebrities it is by a lucky accident, it is only because their own table is full. For they have a table of their own, these great ones, and few there are to whom it is permitted to recline at the banquet of the gods.

Prof. Kent's Lecture

Quite a little stir was caused by the action of several very good orthodox people during Professor (Charles F.) Kent's lecture on Biblical criticism. The professor stated that most of (Robert) Ingersoll's premises were true, and were founded on Bible truths. At this point a number of good people arose and left the auditorium. It would have spared their feelings if they had remained to hear the rest of the professor's half completed sentence, which was that though Mr. Ingersoll's premises were true, his conclusions were utterly false. Dr. Kent is thoroughly a scholar and a Christian, and is one of the most orthodox men in the world. The trouble with the orthodox people is that they will never recognize their own bright light and always insist upon stoning their own prophets before they give them a hearing.

(July 9, 1894)

On Death Comes for the Archbishop

It is not enough to say that Willa Cather's novel **Death Comes for the Archbishop** is merely a story of Archbishop Jean Marie Latour, his friend Father Joseph Vaillant, their lives, or their missionary experiences among the people in the newly annexed territory of New Mexico. For moving throughout the book as "quietly and in the same unobtrusive domeanour" (p. 235) as the Navajos she writes about, is a sensitive and intimate view of multi-cultural relationships—human relationships and a feeling for the Native American culture in this region.

As Bishop Latour begins his Episcopacy in that "enormous territory that was once the cradle of the Faith in the New World" (p. 6), we gain some insight into his personality and some clues to his successful relationships with the Native Americans. The fact that he chose an old adobe house made by the Indians as his residence may be indicative. A brief description of one of the rooms gives a feeling of the atmosphere. "It was a long room of an agreeable shape. The thick clay walls had been finished on the inside by the deft palms of Indian women, and had that irregular and intimate quality of things made entirely by the human hand. There was a reassuring solidity and depth about these

walls, rounded at door-sills and window-sills, rounded in wide wings about the corner fireplace" (pp. 33-34).

The Bishop actually spent very little time in his adobe home. He often travelled for months westward among the old isolated Indian missions in an attempt to know his Diocese and its people. When going on these long journeys, he would often take Jacinto, "a young Indian from the Pecos Pueblo," as a guide. The two men developed a relationship based on trust and a communication more subtle than the spoken word. After travelling "all day through the dry desert plain west of Albuquerque" (p. 88), the two men made camp in a "pleasant spot on the rocks north of the village" (p. 90). As the night closed in about them, "They relapsed into silence which was their usual form of intercourse" (p. 91).

Integral to this relationship was the respect each had for the other's thoughts, beliefs, and cultural heritage. The Bishop thought it impolite to question his companion in these areas and seldom did so. ". . . he believed it useless. There was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him" (p. 92).

Honesty was yet another facet of this friendship, and Jacinto liked the Bishop's manner of dealing with people. "In his experience, white people put on a false face. The Bishop put on none at all. He stood straight and turned to the Governor of Laguna, and his face underwent no change. Jacinto thought this remarkable" (p. 92).

These attitudes and traits of honesty, trust, and respect are also evident in the longtime friendship the Bishop maintained with Eusabio, a Navajo Indian chief, whom he met shortly after arriving in Santa Fe. "The Navajo was in Santa Fe at that time, assisting the military officers to quiet an outbreak of the never-ending quarrel between his people and the Hopis. Ever since then the Bishop and the Indian Chief had entertained an increasing regard for each other. Eusabio brought his son all the way to Santa Fe to have the Bishop baptize him" (pp. 219-20).

It is the death of this only son that brings the two friends together again. Upon their meeting, Eusabio "did not open his lips, merely stood holding Father Latour's very fine white hand in his very fine dark one, and looked into his face with a message of sorrow and resignation in his deep-set, eagle eyes. A wave of feeling passed over his bronze features as he said slowly: 'My friend has come.' That was all, but it was everything; welcome, confidence, appreciation" (p. 221).

It is through this deep friendship, that we as readers gain a deeper understanding and feeling for the Navajo and his culture. As the two men journey together the Bishop reflects, "Travelling with Eusabio was like travelling with the landscape. . . . Father Latour judged that just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a little (at least to leave some mark of memorial of his sojourn), it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air" (pp. 232-33).

Perhaps it is this great respect for the land and the careful patience which is so much a part of Eusabio's culture that aided in developing the deep regard these

two men had for each other. "In the working of silver or drilling of turquoise the Indians had exhaustless patience; upon their blankets and belts and ceremonial robes they lavished their skill and pains. But their conception of decoration did not extend to the landscape. They seemed to have none of the European's desire to 'master' nature, to arrange and recreate. . . . It was as if the great country were asleep, and they wished to carry on their lives without awakening it" (p. 234).

The two men meet once again; this time the occasion bringing them together is the Bishop's approaching death. The old friends visit briefly and Eusabio asks, "You remember when we came together once to Santa Fe from my country? How long it take us? Two weeks, pretty near. Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things" (p. 291). Shortly after this visit, the Bishop dies, and Eusabio goes quietly away to tell his people.

Willa Cather's racial tolerance as evidenced in her description of the multi-cultural friendships in this book may seem somewhat miraculous when we consider the novel was written almost fifty years ago.

Friendships of the beauty and depth described between Bishop Latour, Jacinto and Eusabio may seem to take a miracle to achieve today, particularly when given the complexities of modern society, but perhaps a miracle is not so hard to attain if we can think of miracles as Father Vaillant and the Bishop describe them. If we can keep in mind ". . . our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always" (p. 50).

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