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JAMES LANE ALLEN

AS A DEVOTED FRIEND KNEW HIM

JAMES LANE ALLEN'S friendship to me has been one of the most enchanting and germinal influences of my life. If I could in some way retrieve that infinitely precious and fastidious personality who has been so little known and so misunderstood I should be greatly gratified. The atmosphere of seclusion which Mr. Allen wove around his life has been mistaken for unsociable isolation and exclusiveness. He has been pictured as "lonely, oversensitive, melancholy and too touchy with his friends."

I have been asked to say something about the man James Lane Allen as I knew him. I shall not presume to criticise nor defend his writings; there have been many able scholars to condemn, and many others to praise his works.

I stand to symbolize his worshipping public when it was the fashion to read and discuss James Lane Allen. I suppose I am of the romantic school which holds that the critical virtue lies in sympathy, and I agree with Norman Foerster who says that "the best critic is he who reveals the nature of the beautiful things by a complete understanding of the creative intent in them."

Mr. Allen's great popularity was no doubt, to some extent, due to sentimentality, but his characters, whether trivial or significant, were always believed in by the author. Mr. Allen was never a satirist—perhaps because he had been a teacher—and said that the satirist is great not by what he creates, but what he destroys.

I lived in Asheville, North Carolina, where and when literary people were few, and writers those far-away strange creatures we only heard about. Today writers come in crowds, treading on one another's

heels, those behind forcing on those in front—as a crowd passing before a dead hero lying in state—passing on, going out continually, a few pausing, none stopping. Writing was not the pastime of everyone in Mr. Allen's day, and reputations were not so numerous; but I do know that James Lane Allen was read, admired and courted when I began reading, and admiring and worshipping the much talked about author of *The Choir Invisible* and the *Kentucky Cardinal*.

My mother came from Kentucky and was a contemporary of Mr. Allen, though she had never known him. She left Kentucky before Mr. Allen was generally known. From her I imbibed that wonder and romance that was a part of Kentucky of the sixties and seventies. When a child I spent much time in Louisville, Lexington, and Bardstown, living in some of the oldest and most beautiful homes in Kentucky.

The old Bishop Flaget's house joining the beautiful St. Joseph's Cathedral in Bardstown was for a long time the home of my aunt. I slept in the very room once occupied by Louis Philippe while he was an exile and the guest of Bishop Flaget. Many times when a child have I gone into the imposing St. Joseph's and sat in silent admiration in the presence of those works of art Louis Philippe sent back to Bardstown after he became King of France. I often visited the convent Nazareth and the Trappist monastery Gethsemane near Bardstown. *The White Cowl* and *Sister Dolores* were suggested by Mr. Allen's knowledge of these hallowed places, though he told me he had actually never been there.

I mention these things that you may understand that I had heard much about James Lane Allen before I was old enough to read his books.

I was about sixteen when I read *The*

Choir Invisible. The reading of this book did for me what it must have done for thousands of beauty-seeking, eager minded youth of my day.

While I was reading *The Kentucky Cardinal* a very handsome, a regal looking woman from Kentucky came to see my mother. She noticed me and the book I held, then said, "I know very well the author of this book. If Mr. Allen should ever come to Asheville, be sure to see him, and tell him a friend who admires and esteems him sent you to him." If Ariel himself had appeared with dew from the Bermudas, I could have been no less amazed than I was at being in the presence of one who knew James Lane Allen well. When this very beautiful person left, my mother said, "James Lane Allen was once madly in love with this charming lady."

Years passed, I returned from college and was teaching in Asheville. One afternoon on my return from school, I took the morning paper and was startled when I read these headlines, "James Lane Allen, the noted American author, is registered at the Manor."

My father had known Sidney Lanier, my grandmother had known many literary personages, but James Lane Allen held something that seemed just for me. With feelings a-tremble I wrote a very short, very proper note to Mr. Allen, telling him what his friend had said to me. By return mail I had a letter from him asking me to come to see him the following Saturday morning.

I went. On the instant we were friends. It is most remarkable that I had been told nothing of his personal appearance; in my mind's eye I had pictured Mr. Allen as small, sallow—with dark eyes and grey hair—and somewhat insignificant looking. Imagine my surprise when I saw him standing strong and firm on his feet, bearing his six-feet-two figure with an exquisite nicety of carriage at once natural and cultivated. He was the picture of health, intellect, and fineness—a perfect Anglo-Sax-

on type. He had eloquent eyes, a gentle, compelling voice. Mr. Allen must have been about fifty-five years old when I first saw him, though he looked much younger. If you have ever accompanied on the piano singers or violinists, you know what it means to be attuned in perfect accord. So we were despite the great difference in our ages.

We discussed the local history, the scenery around us, and many personal things. He spoke in an ordinary tone of voice about the characters of his stories, lending to them an air of intimacy and familiarity. When I told him that I had become interested in ornithology after having read the *Kentucky Cardinal*, and that Gilbert Pearson, for many years president of the National Audubon Society, had received his inspiration from the same source, Mr. Allen was extremely gratified. He was eager to go with me to the Cherokee Indian country and asked about the Cherokee rose. He had never heard the story of the sad love affair of the mocking bird and the cardinal and was amused when I told him this legend.

I think Mr. Allen felt that I understood some of the things that had touched his heart. He was to the unfeeling outside world grouchy, cold, and too high for reach. To me he was warm, tender, and deeply lovable. I was most surprised when he told me quite frankly about his love for the beautiful lady who had been the inspiration of my introducing myself to him.

He said, "Yes, a very beautiful lady. She looked as if the blood of a thousand earls flowed in her veins. But it is perhaps best as it is."

Mr. Allen cast a golden glow over everything he touched, and brought to the surface the best in the hearts of people and things. He related simple everyday things with that fairy-like touch, a kind penetrating psychology or a sort of sorcery that baffled analysis. His personality was a fusion of life and dream; the very charm of poetry animated his being. He gave out

something, a vital magic, that has been a joyful experience of my life.

James Lane Allen's work must be appraised from a pragmatic approach. One must be conscious of the continuity of his creative art to realize the potency of his influence on his time and the future.

Several times I was with Mr. Allen in Asheville. We walked over the hills on the east and looked into the beauty of the western mountains across Asheville. His love for nature was fine and sensitive, thoughtful and discerning.

The presence and personality of James Lane Allen must always live in the memory of those fortunate enough to have known him. I still recall his noble face, and hear again his voice that fell upon one's heart like dew. In his day there were few who could escape his enchantment.

After leaving Asheville Mr. Allen wrote to me. A book from him was excuse for my writing him a long letter.

My knowing Mr. Allen was an open sesame to many rare souls. Christian Reid, author of *The Land of the Sky*, sent for me when I was in Salisbury that I might tell her something about James Lane Allen. In Farmville, Virginia, I boarded with Jennie Tabb, who told me of Father Tabb's devotion to James Lane Allen. I mention only two from many who desired to hear something about this charming personality.

For many years, because of losses, sorrows and many things, I lost contact with Mr. Allen and was completely unaware that his public had turned against him. I did not react against *The Bride of the Mistletoe* as did so many others. It seemed to me any real lover of Virgil—Mr. Allen was much like Virgil, though in his desire to penetrate the mystic he was not unlike Shelley—could see that he had painted an exquisite picture of "man's mystical union with nature."

We were living in Athens, Georgia, when I saw *The Ash-Can*, which came out in *The*

Century of 1921. I wrote to Mr. Allen about it. He answered at once, expressing his delight that I had broken my long silence.

A short time after this I again joined him in Asheville. In the presence of those all-comprising mountains we "remembered things outlasting memory." He was grateful that I had not misunderstood the "intent" of his *The Bride of the Mistletoe*. He told me of his purpose to complete the trilogy. I think he told me the title of his third book, but I did not record it in my memory. I shall always regret this, for he never lived to write the third book.

Mr. Allen promised to visit me, told me how he had to conserve his health because he must finish his work.

"And yet unless somehow I do the deed,
An exile I must be from this fair land,
Nor with my Peers shall I have heart to stand"

was the ever-recurring burden of his talk with me.

Because of Mr. Allen's failing health he never visited me, but his spirit has seemed near. When I wrote him about *Miss Locke* published in the March, 1922, *Century* he replied saying, "What you think pleases me more than anything I have heard of it."

For five or six years before the death of Mr. Allen I sent him a box on his birthday which came a few days before Christmas. Because of my eagerness to make something that would please him I almost became a cook. During the whole year I thought, "What can I put in my friend's box that will give him rare pleasure?" That these boxes did make Mr. Allen happy is one of the most precious possessions of my memory. I learned to make beautiful and delectable candies and wines that might please his sensitive palate. I even learned to crystallize sprays of mint that he might use them to make his mint juleps so precious to all Kentucky gentlemen.

Believing that personal letters give an intimate approach to character, I have chosen

a few of Mr. Allen's letters to me for your consideration. His penmanship like his character was bold, nice, and beautiful.

New York
August twenty-third
Nineteen Hundred Twenty-Two

Dear Mrs. Heatwole:

She arrived only today! I now know, if you had been a novelist, what kind of woman one of your heroines would have been; and if you had been a coquette, how you would have coquetted. And I know that if I had years ago met this creature alive, I'd have been a maimed man, for the right kind of yielding is in her eye!

You have given me a very joyous day. I had to call in the (German) housekeeper to share the arrival and she collapsed into two hundred pounds of sentimentality. Most, I think, she loved the basket. If only there could have been music in the Rhine Park and a full moon! The Rhine Moon. As she left she said, "Now you have a woman in your room." I replied, "Yes, but I must not fall in love with her bottle heart."

What you say about the story is very helpful. I sent you a very special message. You do not speak of it.

I am, with great delight,

Sincerely yours,

JAMES LANE ALLEN

The Wine! the good wine!! Miss De Canter's patience is going to be tried! I expect her to lose her temper some this night!

The "Lady Dollie DeCanter" was a water bottle, into which a cork stopper fitted. On the stopper had been put a doll's head. The whole "creature" was dressed as a charming Kentucky belle of the early seventies. Lady Dollie was dressed for a garden party and carried on her arm a basket of flowers—pink roses and forget-me-nots. Her full skirts concealed the wine that filled her body. She really was quite bewitching and would have deceived the most hardened prohibition officer.

158 West 75th Street

October 10, 1922

Dear Mrs. Heatwole:

I have not been well and for this reason I have not written. I am not well now, but am writing now, because there are things that one wishes to do though knowing that one will not do them well.

The wine has arrived—the wines. At one, on two nights, I solaced a malady and entertained myself with some of the blackberry, and then was made more ill by seeing how down in the bottle it had gone! That a thing so wondrous good should give out—that's life. The dandelion has

only been inspected, and hope supports itself upon self-denial.

The petticoats of the young lady who shares my room with me are worthy of us both. I had at once recognized them as of the Kentucky period of my earliest recollection and affection.

I am delighted to hear about your going to Richmond. You will meet a friend of mine there—a most charming human being—Miss Ellen Glasgow.

I am most gratefully, and delightedly,

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Mr. Allen's letters bear witness to his tender appreciation of even the smallest favors bestowed upon him by his friends.

158 West 75th Street

April 7, 1923

My dear Mrs. Heatwole:

The box reached me last Monday. I have been very unwell since then, more than unwell, and for this reason have not written. An immediate acknowledgment might, indeed, have been sent but was less than I desired to send.

I should perhaps now say that I have been very unwell throughout the year. The coming of the box, coming when it did, seemed a fulfilment of more than even its friendly intentions. I shall rely upon its cordials for the kind of help they give. I have told you before that you are psychic.

I know you rest assured that I have overlooked nothing, *nothing*, of all that you have done for my pleasure and happiness in this ransacking of your pantry and heirlooms, in this doing of beautiful things beautifully. Of these separately I hope to speak again.

I am sending you my photograph. It will give me pleasure to think of its having a place on your desk.

With the highest esteem and appreciation, I am

Sincerely yours,

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Though Mr. Allen was meticulous on the point of acknowledging favors, he never mentioned the many beautiful presents he sent to me excepting the picture of himself, which I prize so highly.

May 12, 1923

My dear, dear Mrs. Heatwole:

Last night toward a sleepless midnight—I called upon myself for a glass of your dandelion wine and then I thought it better to take two! You see, I must let you know that a good many such nights—many too many—I have been quieted and rallied by these delicious cordials from your berries, your grapes, and your—meadow wild places, as one happens to see them.

There is in Lexington, Kentucky, a John Madford Historical Library, and they have already made a place there for me with a small collection of things from me or that were mine. The wonderful piece of linen you sent me will in time go there. I sent them some time ago such a piece of linen made in near-pioneer days on my great-

grandmother's farm near Lexington. How did you know how deeply interested I am in old-time linen?

But do you really know how much you mean to me?

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Mr. Allen never knew that I mixed with the simple home-made wines I sent to him a generous portion of pre-Volstead French cognac.

June 9, 1924

Dear Mrs. Heatwole:

What you write of the story brings me great pleasure. I have felt most curious as to its effect upon my friends, since it lies in a new field to them. It is not a new field to me, lying always within me and trodden often—alone.

You must not write such a wonderful letter and at the end call it "miserable." That sounds like some other woman!!

I have read many times what you write of the story and am more pleased than you are aware.

I have a real carbuncle on my neck!

Yours,

JAMES LANE ALLEN

The story referred to was *The Violet*.

Saturday, July 14th, 1924

Dear Mrs. Heatwole:

You must try to understand, without assurances from me, how greatly I appreciate the box. What I should say about it would mean little. This kindness of yours enters into my life as a very real happiness. You can never know what you have been to me.

I shall have "beat biscuit fa breakfast"—with memories not of New York.

Some wonderful letters have come to me about the story. But it is not the kind of story in regard to which readers feel inclined to write. There are things in it that call for the uncommunicated response.

The young lovers, asking of each other the same thing and that the highest, were made to suffer in their ideals for their little faults—made to ever suffer in the way that little faults have of doing their deadly work.

My head has been turned by the manner in which I dressed the maid! What did you think? All the ladies in all my books—if they but knew what study I have bestowed upon their costumes!

My best thoughts go to you.

Sincerely yours,

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Mr. Allen was in a way shy. I think that was due to the fact that he felt he was a person apart from the thousand and ten thousand commonplace mortals. He did not scorn them, but felt he must not let this precious gift of the gods—whatever that

may be—become less precious by too much exposure.

He was full of humor and wit and loved to be happy. He loved beauty in every form; he disliked pretense and insincerity in people and things. He always impressed me as able to see through the flesh into the very heart of one's soul. He was always perfectly dressed, perfectly poised, and by far the most distinguished looking man it has been my good fortune to see. No one could think evil in his presence and I think he felt the need of high atmosphere in which to let his spirit live. He did not like many people. I regarded this most carefully and never introduced but one person to him. I did introduce Stark Young—who was a dear friend of mine—to Mr. Allen. Stark was then a senior at Columbia. Mr. Allen was most kind and wrote to me that he saw great promise in the young student I had sent to him.

It has not been easy for me to tell these personal things about a friend who had worked for his works' sake, caring little for notoriety.

SUE PORTER HEATWOLE

PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION FOR LIBRARIANS AND TEACHER-LI- BRARIANS

ONE of the big problems facing the teachers colleges at the present time is adequate training facilities for preparing library-trained teachers and teacher-librarians who can care for small collections of books in addition to some classroom teaching. There are those teachers colleges that have built up accredited library schools for the training of professional school librarians. We shall hope that

This paper was prepared for a round-table discussion of teachers' college librarians at the meeting of the American Library Association in Richmond, May 12, 1936.