

DEDICATION.

Sister Atlanta, this is to you.
You took such interest in all I did
When you were by my side, I feel you still,
Looking from the azure galleries,
Witness the greater dramas of the world
With an appreciation of the passions
(Those mightiest actors) in the commonplace
Working a splendid theme to rightful issue.
This is to you, to whom the world's a stage.

THIS IS WHY.

Some may not consider this poetry. I don't care. A Kansan has a right to see and say things differently from others. If I spoke as others, there would be no sufficient reason why I should speak at all.

This book is in a style so different from the conventional that it will be judged as either foolish or revolutionary, depending on how much imagination the reader may possess; but Kansans, as I show in the book, have always had large visions, and I do not hesitate to make my appeal to them.

The treatment of this book is a revolt against word juggling and the tinkling of verbal cymbals so commonly received as poetry, and on the other hand, an assumption that all the people are poets, and need only such simple expression as they can understand and see through, to the vision behind it, to enable them to develop the gift that is next to religion in dignity and comfort.

The preparation of the book is predicated on the following ideas: 1. Poetry is never in words

but always in visions that the words may inspire in the reader; therefore simile and metaphor, jingle and juggle, are no necessary part of poetry. 2. When all poetry was lyrical, for song or chant, rhyme was a proper form for poetry to wear; but now that most poetry is read, not aloud but silently, there is little need for rhyme or even alliteration, except in songs and hymns; and that form is best which, while preserving the meter that makes the step easy, and a certain elegance of expression suited to appeal to psychic senses, so closely resembles prose as to be naturally read. 3. People like poetry as much as they ever did; the reason it is supposed to be a decadent art, and made the subject of jest, is that it has been assigned to a poetry-making class and cut to meet the need of unimaginative editors, with the result that it has become mere polishing of words rather than an appeal to the imagination of the many. 4. Overdressing of verse, so as to cause the reader to consider the words and phrases, rather than the subject matter, is as vulgar as that overdressing of people which calls attention to the clothing rather than quietly bringing out the individual's character. 5. Poetry is not in words or form; though, like religion, it is expressed in words and forms. It is in the mind and sentiment of

the reader. The bigger the theme, therefore, the greater is likely to be the poem. Great racial movements that bring with them tremendous action have from the beginning been the themes of the great poems — from the Iliad to the Divine Comedy, from the Hebrew Chronicles to Shakespeare's Caesar. 6. There is in racial movements the same completion of cycles that there is in the development of vegetable or individual human life; and he who brings the people to understand the unity and fullness of these actions has awakened the mind to a fact that is the very basis of poetry. But because the fancy of the people, that lies at the root of national art, has been smothered, at first one must make the general proposition so simple as to be clear, even at the sacrifice of detail that might at this time becloud the wider view. 7. Since poetry is always mental and psychic, just as religion is, much should always be left to the imagination of the reader. If it is not, he is cheated out of the development of the poetic instinct that is in him and in all. All people will not be able to catch the mental pictures suggested by words with equal felicity, but this does not argue that each should not be given chance for the display of such fancy as he may possess. If in crude, big generalities a

man or woman is able to see many pictures that are suggested by them, then in these Dramas of Kansas will be found the truest of poetry.

But the poetry is first in actual action and second in the reproduction of that action on the thought of the reader. The more part he has in it, the better for him. The bible told of the creation in a few sticksfull of matter; but the poetry behind it has never been exhausted. These I present are large pictures, outdoor scenes, in outline only. I hold that as the whole of America has been subjected to the Northeast, and in particular to New York City, in a financial way, so it has also been made slavish in a literary way by the dominance of the Northeast. As proof of this I quote two paragraphs from the New York World of October 18, 1914:

The land within the boundaries of New York city is assessed at \$7,800,180,532—it is worth \$10,000,000,000. It is more than the assessed valuation of all the states west of the Mississippi river.

Of all the printed publications in the United States, New York city turns out one-fourth.

While this great machine may draw writers from all sections, as it draws wealth from the veins of all the nation, all must conform to the rules laid down by New York. Publications

outside the city follow New York's style. Poetry must be of a certain length, and nearly always in rhyme; the story, the sketch, the special article must be as New York editors declare, both as to length and manner of treatment. Just as the nation has become subjugated financially, so its expression in art and literature is also cramped by chains fastened on us by New York City, and poisoned by crotics from the overflowing flood from Europe.

Don't imagine I expect to change this. This book is a protest. It is a call to Kansans to lead a revolt against the domination of the big city, as it once led the revolt against the arrogance of a mastering south. But unless Kansas responds I can do nothing. And when response comes, if the old Kansas be yet alive, it may not adopt this form—I would not bind to my forms any more than I would have it bound to other forms—and it may sweep far beyond what I have outlined. I merely call to Kansas. I merely believe that, as the art of acting has been revolutionized by great shadows and tremendous pictures that do not speak, the time is ripe for freeing literature from old conventions and erotic philosophy and turning it to mental visions of the wholesome type, of great outdoor

actions. It is mine to utter the cry, and yours to respond.

If Kansas has done things in a big and startling way, it is not because Kansans were freaks. Rather, it is because they, better perhaps than any people in the world, caught the psychology of the occasion. The whole American people, being in a big place, like the spectacular; if they had not liked it, all efforts of Kansas to interest them in big things done in odd ways would have been wasted. Beside, this is an age of salesmanship, and advertising belongs to it. Kansas advertised. If I have caught the large facts and presented them to the reader so he shall in his imagination see the mighty dramas enacted on the stage of Kansas, then I shall have brought poetry to him, and shall be content, even though critics may cavil that my form of words does not conform to the standards they have arbitrarily and foolishly adopted.

LINCOLN PHIPER.

KANSAS A STAGE.

Kansas is a stage set in the midst
Of the United States. It eastward slopes
From the high mountain chain of Colorado,
Which forms a fitting background; in the center
A city on a hill; at th' left front
A mighty river with its sylvan scenes;
As if prepared and set to give the world,
Eastward, view of great dramas. There is not
A state in all the union that has staged
So many social tragedies. They were
Made up and played without rehearsal; still
They have all elements the great play has,
In costuming, in beauteous scenery,
In odd types, and in humor 'mid the pathos
Of great performance. Never was a time,
Never a place, that staged such splendid dramas,
One after th' other, as did the state of Kansas.
Never were actors greater than appeared
Upon this stage, in action that meant more
For all humanity.