

THE ALUMNÆ NEWS

Published Monthly by the Associate Alumnae of Hunter College of the City of New York

Entered as second class matter, 1895, at the post-office at New Rochelle under the Act of March 3, 1879.

VOL. XXXIX

NEW ROCHELLE, N. Y., MARCH, 1934

No. 3

HELEN GRAY CONE, POET

From 1885 to 1919, Helen Gray Cone published five volumes of verse which, though establishing her among minor poets of America and giving her a measure of international fame, are but the overflow of her vitality, mere marginalia on the closely written pages of her devotion to Hunter College. *Oberon and Puck*, *Verses Grave and Gay* (1885), *The Ride to the Lady* (1891), *Soldiers of the Light* (1911), *A Chant of Love for England* (1915), *The Coat without a Seam* (1919) were increased, 1930, by a volume of selections, *Harvest Home*, "Summer's green all girded up in sheaves." In this last are found, presumably, auctorial preferences, those poems on which in the estimation of Helen Gray Cone rested her modest claim to immortality, typified by the vanished meteor: "Brief memory of a moment touched with light."

Throughout these miscellaneous poems are the firm and fine fashioning noticed by the *New York Times*, and the delicacy of imagination praised by the *Outlook*, on the appearance of *A Chant of Love*. From the beginning they reveal not only tenderness, sympathy, love of nature,

"Peace of roses in a rain-sweet garden,
Peace of moonlit silver-heaving waters";

reflect not only the influence of music, mythology, and the masters, celebrated in proud humility; they embody noble themes, whether the romantic morning aspiration of the brave heart, the constant ideal of duty, "steadily facing today," or the recognition that

"Life is battle even to the sunset."

Here are poems of a fanciful mind which sees, for example, in evening primroses candles lighted by a fairy, or in the hepatica a shy beggar maid under a mantle of russet leaf; poems of humorous turn, well-exemplified by "Narcissus in Camden," a puckish satire on Walt Whitman; poems that respond for the artist's soul to a nocturne of Rubinstein, the medieval color of Chaucer and Dante, the beauty of Keats, the melody of Tennyson, the Greek perfection of Lander; poems that echo with deepening appreciation the voice of Shakespeare. In their highest flights these poems are inspired by patriotism, by hope of freedom for all men, emancipation from shackles of the spirit, by a vision of the brotherhood of man.

Standing before LePage's "Joan of Arc," in the Metropolitan Museum, Helen Gray Cone heard the message that let the girl of Domrémy know no peace,
"Till that the king be crowned, and France
be free!"

The same ideal ends her justly renowned

"Ode to Lincoln":

"Ah, never, till every spirit shall stand up
free,

Comes the great Liberator's jubilee!"

Hers was never license or false freedom, but freedom hand in hand with duty. Her longest poem, "The Third Day at Gettysburg," reports rain of bullets, flash of sabre, and boom of cannon not less vividly than it proclaims "the larger Hope and the limitless future of Manhood," not less faithfully than it urges

"All a man hath will he give for his life
—but his life for his Duty."

Common duty, the task of every day, she raised to the plane of poetry in her perhaps best-loved sonnet, "The Common Street," or modern Jacob's dream.

Her poems declare no hate but that of hate. Among those who read, on its first publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*, her magnificent reply to Lissauer, I throbbed to her ringing words. Next morning, early, I rushed to her office. At my knock she opened the door and, after I burst forth with what admiration I do not now recall, she flashed, "The top of my head would have flown off had I not written that out of my system!" Characteristically, she turned to routine duties, and I walked down the hall to my classroom, still vibrating to her scorn,

"Where is the giant shot that kills

Wordsworth walking the old green hills?"

She was a master of metrics, and though she loved well the sonnet form, expressing in its neat compactness many of her weightiest thoughts, she moved with unfettered skill through varied rhythm and length of line. In her tribute to Joyce Kilmer, for example, "The Way of the White Souls," she preferred a generously flowing measure, which evokes tramping columns of soldiers,

"And there the swinging soul of him goes
on with the marching stars."

Beyond the sacrifice of these soldiers of the light—dear to her the word "light"—always she saw the flag of all souls triumphing in goodwill; always she dreamed of the day when men should wear the coat without a seam, the coat woven of the blue that is the sky of God, the red that is the blood of man.

Gone from us, our laureate poet yet lives for Hunter College and all the children of Hunter College in the heritage she has left, heritage of her gallant spirit, sense of honor, sense of duty, power of sympathy, and challenge to courage. And she will live for others so long as America remembers Lincoln, so long as England cherishes the glory that inspired "A Chant of Love."

BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS.

OUR PRESIDENT'S TRIBUTE

"To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die."

Our beloved Helen Gray Cone has gone from us—but she will never be dead to us.

By many she will be remembered as teacher, by many as poet, by others as our most distinguished alumna—but by all will she be remembered for the fineness and beauty of her spirit. Her sweetness, her modesty, her charm; her strength, her charity of thought, her sense of justice; these are the things that will live forever in our hearts, these are the things which will build a monument to her memory that can never fade.

We mourn her going, but we rejoice that she has been!

IRENE B. GRAFF, President.

FROM THE SON OF PROFESSOR
GILLET

Just now our thoughts are saddened by a sense of personal loss in the death of Hunter College's poet-laureate, the late Helen Gray Cone. We dearly miss the wise captaincy of her mind, the play of her humor, the inspiration of her brave, high-spirited, heartening personality. When the time comes for the appraisal of her contribution to American poetry, let us be sure not to merit the rebuke of her *Arraignment*:

"Ye guessed not the word we spake was
a living word,
Applauding the sound . . .
We sobbed you our message; ye said,
'It is song, and sweet!'"

Professor Cone was master of the singing phrase reverberant of the best in English poetry. But fond of eloquence as she was, and of such loveliness as the "peace of roses in a rain-sweet garden," she was anything but "an idle singer of an empty day." Her most representative poem, like the bright light in her eye, was always in recognition of generous, heroic, noble action, or high endeavor. The poems she wrote during the Great War show what valiancy the experience of life—its adversities as well as its exaltations—had put into her blood. She belongs in the proudly American tradition of her friend, Richard Watson Gilder, with those who find the most thrilling and deeply satisfying poetry in service.

"In the wards of pain, the ways of labor,
In the stony deserts of the city."

She would well understand what Barrie meant by speaking of the songs and cheery conversation of Captain Scott and his men at point of death in the Antarctic as beauty. A finely tempered and resolute soul, quick to feel and respond to what made life a joyous battle, with always the most appropriate meed of praise for true "Soldiers of the Light," she herself has now passed into her own "wide Way of White Souls," leaving behind this heartfelt message of beauty, courage, and honor to cheer our spirits on.

LOUIS BLISS GILLET.

MEMORIAL SERVICE
FOR HELEN GRAY CONE

The passing of Helen Gray Cone leaves in our hearts a sense of irreparable loss. Yet the shining memory of her spirit, her high ardour and courage is itself a comfort in our days of grief.

Many will remember that the seventy-fifth anniversary of her birth will fall on Thursday, March 8, of this year. On the afternoon of that day, at four o'clock, the Associate Alumnae will hold a memorial service for Helen Gray Cone in the auditorium of the College, at 68th St. and Lexington Ave.

The committee appointed by our President, Mrs. Graff, to make the arrangements for the exercises takes this means of communicating to all the members of the Alumnae the announcement of the service, and of urging that they inform friends and fellow-graduates of our plan.

ADELE BILDERSEE
GERTRUDE E. ECKEL
HANNAH M. EGAN
DOROTHEA C. HESS
MARGUERITE E. JONES
ALICE I. POPPER
ELIZABETH P. STEIN
ANNA W. MICHELS, Chairman
IRENE BRANDON GRAFF, ex-officio

SPECIAL BULLETIN IN MEMORY
OF HELEN GRAY CONE

The writer, as an old editor of the *Bulletin* and as a student, colleague, and friend of Helen Gray Cone, has been entrusted with the sad yet glad and very precious task of preparing a special memorial issue of the *Hunter College Bulletin* to appear on March eighth, her birthday.

Those from whom contributions have already been received at the time of the writing of this note include Dr. Colligan and Dr. Kieran; Dr. Ruth Lewinson of the Board of Higher Education; Professor Williams, Professor Reilly, and many other members of the English Department; other colleagues of Professor Cone's, as Professor Whicher, Professor Prentiss, Dean Bildersee; some who write especially as her students, including Amelia Josephine Burr and Professor Mary Belden James Lehn, both of whom have won distinction in the field of literature; a number of prominent alumnae, including Mrs. Graff, Miss Anna M. Hunter, Mrs. Daniel P. Hays; members of the Traditions Committee; holders of the Helen Gray Cone Fellowship; Soia Mentschikoff, President of the Student Association, who tells what Helen Gray Cone meant to the Hunter girl of to-day.

The *Bulletin* will also contain Professor Cone's picture, an outline of her main activities, and reprints of some of her poems.

Those desiring a copy mailed to them are asked to send *in advance of the date of issue* twelve cents in coin or stamps to the undersigned, at 640 Riverside Drive or at Hunter College.

E. ADELAIDE HAHN,

"THE GOOD SHIP ALMA MATER" SAILS ACROSS THE SEAS

When Helen Gray Cone wrote "The Good Ship Alma Mater," she brought the poem to Professor George Mangold, with the request that he write the music for it. The following summer, Professor Mangold showed the song to his sister, a well-known poetess in Germany, who was so much impressed by the words that she translated the poem into German, and it was used as a college song by the "Gymnasiums" or high schools along the Rhine. Professor Cone, while abroad, was surprised one day to hear some students singing Miss Mangold's translation of her song. When Professor Mangold died in 1900, among the floral tributes sent to his funeral was a wreath of roses, and on the card accompanying it was written:

"Sail on through sunny waters.
With more than lips can tell
Of sorrow at our parting
I send this last farewell.

HELEN GRAY CONE."

This card was found among Mrs. Mangold's papers, on the latter's death in 1917.

(MRS. OTTO) JOSEPHINE KINZEL, 1896.

A PROPOSED MEMORIAL FOR HELEN GRAY CONE

The following message seems most appropriate at the present moment:

"Dear Friends:

"Not long ago I received a letter on behalf of the Hunter College Alumnae Committee of the Lenox Hill Settlement, which is doing fine work in its new building in East 70th Street.

"The Alumnae Committee is responsible for the Children's Lunch Room.

"Mrs. Casey tells me that the little tables in that room are being supplied and dedicated to the memory of friends of the Lenox Hill Settlement.

"A table costs one hundred dollars.

"Mrs. Casey suggested that one of these would be a fitting memorial for Emma Klanser of '76, our beloved Secretary, who died in 1923. Miss Klanser was deeply interested in Lenox Hill.

"It would be far from the desire of our comrade that any funds should be solicited for this purpose, and therefore I will ask you to regard this notice as information in regard to an opportunity to do what some friends would wish to do.

"Any one desiring to contribute to the memorial for Miss Klanser, will please send her check to me.

"HELEN GRAY CONE,

"President of the Class of '76."

Does not the above letter make you feel that a similar memorial would be a fitting tribute to our beloved Helen Gray Cone?

Wouldn't you like to contribute to the endowment of a table in her name?

MRS. P. J. CASEY,

Robert Fulton Hotel,

228 West 71st Street.

THE HELEN GRAY CONE FELLOW- SHIP

As a result of the adverse business conditions prevailing during the past two years the income of the Helen Gray Cone Fellowship endowment has been greatly diminished, and it will be impossible to award this year the usual sum of \$1,100. In view of this fact the Committee of Award has decided to rescind the provision that the winner of the Fellowship must pursue graduate study at an institution outside New York City.

In June 1934 the sum of \$550. will be awarded to an alumna of Hunter College who has displayed exceptional ability in English work, no matter what her major or minor studies may have been. This sum is to be used to defray the expense of graduate study in English at an approved university for one year. Applications for the memorial award must be in the hands of the Chairman, Dr. Blanche Colton Williams, by March 1, 1934.

The Committee of Award, Professor Williams, Professor Prentiss, Professor MacLear, Professor Temple, and Miss Lindsay, take this opportunity to express their deep sorrow at the loss of their beloved honorary member, Helen Gray Cone, who passed away January 31st, 1934. Despite their grief, the members of the committee rejoice that Professor Cone had the happiness of realization that the Fellowship established in her honor in 1927 had been of service to three graduates of the college, Cecelia Hotchner, Pearl Handelman, and Rachel Brody.

EMMA K. TEMPLE,

Secretary, Committee of Award.

IN MEMORIAM

The Class of 1886 has recently suffered a severe loss in the death of two of its members: Luella A. Palmer, Superintendent of Kindergartens in New York City, and Minnie B. Levy, a loyal and active member of her class and of the Associate Alumnae.

ESTHER G. VALET.

The arrival of the February issue of THE ALUMNAE NEWS reminded me that I had failed to ask for the removal from the mailing list of the name of my mother, who departed this life on December 24th.

Though she left New York nearly thirty years ago, she was always interested in news of Hunter.

Martha A. Boldt of the Class of '94 was the mother of five children, all of whom she saw through college. Her four daughters are all teaching. That, we think, is quite an honor, though considered no unusual accomplishment by one whose teaching was her "first love."

HELEN OTT.

As we go to press, we learn with sorrow of the death of our distinguished alumna, Jenny B. Merrill. An account of her great services to education will be published next month.