

FIELD KATE

THE DRAMA
OF GLASS

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THE DRAMA OF GLASS

The Drama of Glass was an inspiration born in the brain of Kate Field, as she watched the busy workmen, who with trained eyes and skillful hands, wrought out the products of one of America's great industries that found a temporary home in the World's Fair at Chicago.

It is an addition to the long list of brilliant writings of this versatile woman, whose literary labors have made her memory so dear to the thousands of Americans who have found in them the reflection of her own individuality.

The story of an art that is as old as the building of the City of Babylon, that formed a part in the life of Egypt, that was interwoven in the history of Rome, and that gave a reputation to a nation, is re-told by Miss Field.

From the beginning of the art, wrapped in mystery and legend, step by step her story has become history. She has carried it as far as the World's Fair, and it has devolved upon Mr. Thos. M. Willey to complete what she so well begun.

Have you ever thought what a drama glass plays in the history of the world? It is a drama even in the French acceptation of the word, which infers not only intense action, but death. Can there be more intense action than that of fire, and is not glass the own child of fire and death?

The origin of glass is lost in myth and romance. Nobody knows how it was born, but there are as many traditions as there are cities claiming to be Homer's birthplace. Pliny says that the discovery of glass was due to substituting cakes of nitre for stones as supports for cooking pots.

According to his story, certain Phœnician merchants landed on the coast of Palestine and cooked their food in pots supported on cakes of nitre taken from their cargo.

Great was the wonder of these Phœnicians – the Yankees of antiquity, the builders of Tyre and Sidon, the inventors of the alphabet – on beholding solid matter changed to a strange fluid, which voluntarily mingled with its nearest neighbor, the sand, and made a transparent material now called glass.

This story is too pretty to spoil, and those of us who prefer romance to science will believe it, though Menet the chemist positively declares that to produce such a fluid would require a heat from 1800 to 2700 degrees Fahrenheit. Under the circumstances narrated by Pliny, such a tremendously high temperature was impossible. Science often interferes with romance, and were not truth better even than poetry, science would be a nuisance in literature.

An art that Hermes taught to Egyptian chemists like good wine needs no bush, yet on its brilliant crest may be found the splendid quarterings not only of Egypt, but of Gaul, Rome, Byzantium, Venice, Germany, Bohemia, Great Britain, and last but not least the United States.

He was a poor man, who, in Seneca's day, had not his house decorated with various designs in glass; while Scaurus, the Aedile, a superintendent of public buildings in ancient Rome, actually built a theatre seating forty thousand persons, the second story of which was made of glass. That masterpiece of ancient manufacture, the Portland Vase, was taken from the tomb of the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus, and should bear his name rather than that of the Duchess of Portland, who purchased it from the Barberini family after it had stood three hundred years in their famous Roman gallery.

In the thirteenth century Venice reigned supreme in glass making. No one knows how long the City of Doges might have monopolized certain features of this art but for a woman who could not keep a secret from her lover. Marietta was the daughter of Beroviero, one of the most famous

glass makers of the fifteenth century. Many were his receipts for producing colored glass, and as he had faith in his own flesh and blood he confided these precious receipts to his daughter. Alas, for poor Beroviero! Marietta, after the manner of women, loved a man, one Giorgio, an artisan in her father's employ. History does not tell, but I have no doubt that Giorgio wheedled the secret out of his sweetheart.

Once possessed of these receipts he published and sold them for a large sum, then turning on the man he had betrayed he demanded faithless Marietta in marriage. Thus it came to pass that the ignoble love of a weak woman for a dishonorable man helped to change the fortunes of Venice. The world gained by the destruction of a monopoly, one more proof of the poet's dictum that "all partial evil is universal good."

It was in the middle of this same fifteenth century that a number of Venetian glass makers were imprisoned in London because they could not pay the heavy fine imposed by the Venetian Council for plying their art in foreign lands. "Let us work out our fine," pleaded these victims of prohibition. Their prayer was warmly seconded by England's king, whose intercession was by no means disinterested. Yielding to royal desire, Venice freed these artisans, and thus glass making was established in Great Britain. Beyond the point of reason all prohibitory laws fail sooner or later. Go to the bottom of slang, and as a rule you will find it based on rugged truth. When in the breezy vernacular of this republic a human being is credited with "sand" or is accused of being entirely destitute of it, he rises to high esteem or falls beneath contempt. Possessing "sand" he can command success; without it he is a poor creature. For the origin of this slang we turn to glass making, the excellence of which depends upon sand.

If Bohemia succeeded finally in making clearer and whiter glass than Venice, it was because Bohemia produced better sand. When the town of Murano furnished the world with glass, its population was thirty thousand. That number has dwindled to four thousand. Bohemian glass stood unrivaled until England discovered flint or lead glass; now, the world looks to the United States for rich cut glass, the highest artistic expression of modern glass.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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