

Caruso Loses Heroic Battle For Life

"It is the beginning of the end." This word, uttered with bated breath and hushed voice, swept the musical world on the morning of Sunday, Dec. 12, 1920, when the news spread far and wide that Enrico Caruso, world famous tenor, had burst a blood vessel in his throat while singing at the Brooklyn Academy of Music the previous night. The opera, "L'Elisir d'Amore," came to an abrupt end as the announcement was made that the stricken tenor could not continue the performance.

It was the third mishap of the singer in two weeks. On the evening of Nov. 30, while singing the rôle of Samson in "Samson et Dalila," he had suffered an injury to his head when he was caught beneath the descending pillars in the final scene. Then came the "Paggiacci" incident of Dec. 8. The tenor gave dramatically the aria "Vesti la Giubba," and, torn with a greater emotional feeling than usual, he staggered up the steps of the miniature stage of the strolling players. The moments passed and the audience wondered as the singer failed to return to acknowledge the plaudits. It was rumored that he was injured. The applause did not abate, and the uneasy feeling spread that an accident had occurred.

Caruso emerged from the wings at last, supported by Giuseppe de Luca. Not once did he glance at the auditorium. His left hand was held to his side, the right was raised to his head. The tumult of applause was hushed as the conviction gripped the audience that the singer was hurt.

Some minutes later William J. Guard made an announcement from the stage. Caruso had strained his side in his dramatic exit, he said, but the performance would go on. The intermission was a little longer than usual, while physicians made an examination, but the tenor was not to be deterred. He finished the opera amid cheers from his admirers. Bruno Zirato, Mr. Caruso's secretary, stated the next day that no serious results were anticipated from the accident.

An Unfinished Performance

THE following Saturday came the momentous performance at Brooklyn. It was plainly noticeable in the first act that Mr. Caruso was singing under difficulties. At the conclusion of an early aria he retired to his dressing room, where he was seized with a fit of coughing. Medical aid was again summoned. His condition was said to be serious and it was advised that he be sent home immediately.

For the second time in a week Mr. Guard appeared before the audience. He explained that Mr. Caruso had suffered a rupture of one of the minor blood vessels in his throat, and that the performance was at an end.

The news created consternation in musical and artistic circles. Telegraph and cable carried messages of condolence to the singer's apartment. Flowers burdened every nook and corner of his rooms. Inquiry after inquiry revealed the expectancy in which the news of his condition was awaited. Mr. Caruso spent the Sunday quietly in bed. His personal physician, Dr. Philip Horowitz, was constantly in attendance. His condition improved, and it was announced that the fears expressed over the outcome of the incident had been exaggerated.

High Points in Tenor's Career Summarized

SALIENT events in the spectacular career of Enrico Caruso can be summarized as follows:

Born Naples, Feb. 25, 1873
Operatic début Naples, 1894
Rome début. Costanzi Theater, 1899
First appearances at La Scala, Milan 1901
London début May 14, 1902
American début, Metropolitan, Nov. 23, 1903
Marriage Aug. 20, 1918
Last appearance, Metropolitan, Dec. 24, 1920
Died Aug. 2, 1921

He sang 549 performances in sixteen years at the Metropolitan, appearing fifty-one times during the season of 1907-1908.

A long explanation was penned by Dr. Horowitz to lessen the apprehension of the host of the artist's friends. The accident was an ordinary one, he declared, that might easily have occurred to any individual. The blood vessel was a tiny vein at the base of the tongue, not affecting the vocal cords in any way. A scratch made by swallowing a hard morsel of food might have occasioned the injury. The natural congestion of the singer's throat and the muscular exertion attendant upon singing had converted what might have been a scarcely discernible bleeding into a hemorrhage sufficient to cause discomfort.

The hopeful words of the physician seemed to have been fully warranted,

when the announcement was made that Mr. Caruso would appear the following night (Monday) in "La Forza del Destino." Metropolitan patrons could scarcely credit their senses. It was regarded as the reckless venture of a foolhardy man. A throng—uneasy, hopeful, apprehensive, dubious—flocked to the Metropolitan that night. It was expected—some even hoped—that the great tenor would not be permitted to appear. But he sang, and in a manner as if to quiet forever all fears that might have been entertained in his behalf. He crushed the most skeptical of his doubters by his buoyant, virile phrases; he amazed the most ardent of his enthusiasts by the beauty of his art. Not a trace of injury to his voice was discernible. At times

The Last Time Enrico Caruso Sang



Photo © by Mishkin

Those Who Look for It Will See, or Imagine They See, the Lines of Suffering in This Remarkable Photograph, Taken the Last Time Caruso Sang in Public. On Christmas Eve, Last, Mr. Mishkin Went Personally to the Metropolitan Opera House to Photograph the Tenor as "Eleazar" in "La Juive." He Found Caruso in His Dressing Room, in Acute Pain. But He Sang the Rôle with Little Evidence of His Distress. The Camera, It Would Seem, Caught It and Mirrored It. The Next Day Caruso Was Confined to His Bed, His Long Illness Upon Him. The Photograph Not Only Shows Him as He Appeared on That Historical Night, but Tells in Its Own Way the Story of the Last Time the Greatest of Tenors Donned Costume and Make-up. It Is Published Here for the First Time

Once Called "The Broken Tenor," Caruso Leapt to Operatic Fame

ENRICO CARUSO, the greatest tenor of his day and one of the greatest singers of all time, was born in Naples, Feb. 25, 1873. His father, Marcellino Caruso, was a well-to-do mechanic who knew nothing about music. He was persuaded by the parish priest, however, to let Enrico sing in the choir, which he did until his alto voice began to change into a tenor. It was when about eighteen years of age that the celebrity to be really discovered his voice.



sang just the same! I can honestly say that in those days I sang with every pore in my body. A young fellow about my own age once spoke to me and asked me why I did not learn to sing, as I

had a real tenor voice and could go on the stage and make a fortune. Up to that time I had not thought of it, but the idea pleased me and I willingly accepted the invitation of the stranger, who introduced himself to me as Edoardo Missiano, to go with him to the singing teacher, Guglielmo Vergine at the Naples Conservatory.

Sings for Teacher at Conservatory

"MAESTRO VERGINE was not especially impressed. He said I had a voice 'of a sort' but that it was 'like the gold in the bed of the Tiber, hardly worth drawing out.' Missiano, however, had taken a fancy to my voice and induced Vergine to hear me again which he agreed to do in five days, but I was forbidden to sing at all during that time.

"When I went again I sang the aria from 'The Pearl Fishers' and the Siciliana from 'Cavalleria,' then at the height of its popularity. Vergine said: 'Missiano, I believe that after all you have brought me the right thing. The young man has material but his tone is shrill and whistling. At any rate, I will see what I can do with him.' And so, I became a free pupil of Vergine who was my first teacher."

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he coughed, but that he had frequently done of recent years. His glorious voice had never been in better condition since the opening of the season, and his spirits never so high.

The joy of the musical world was destined to be short lived. He appeared again in "Samson et Delila" at the Metropolitan on Thursday, Dec. 16. A degree of caution was noticed in his singing, but he gave the rôle a fine coloring and a flowing beauty in song.

"L'Elisir d'Amore" Canceled

THE following Wednesday he was scheduled to repeat "L'Elisir d'Amore" at the Metropolitan. A slight indisposition, it was announced, kept him at home, and another opera was substituted. He returned, however, on Christmas eve to sing the rôle of Eleazar in "La Juive." No trace of illness was manifest, and his portrayal of the familiar part possessed all of the strength and power that he was accustomed to impart.

It was his last supreme effort. The delighted audience that had partaken of the inspiration of his Christmas eve venture was the last that would ever be thrilled by his tones. He was sick as he sang, and was seized again on Christmas day, and in the afternoon took to his bed. The news was withheld for a time. The press learned of it Sunday night, and on Monday the world again was plunged into a fever of anxiety by the danger to its beloved tenor.

Five physicians issued reassuring bulletins. They were Drs. Samuel Lambert, Evan M. Evans, Antonia Stella, Francis J. Murray and Philip Horowitz. Caruso, it was learned had helped to decorate a Christmas tree for his daughter Gloria after his return from the opera Friday night. He arose in great pain Christmas morning, and returned to his bed about two o'clock in the afternoon. His sickness was diagnosed as pleurisy.

On Thursday, Dec. 30, it was announced that Mr. Caruso had undergone an operation by Dr. John F. Erdmann for empyema, a condition following an attack of pleurisy. A second and more serious operation was performed the next day. It was rumored that a rib had been removed, but this was later denied. The reports of the physicians were encouraging, and on Tuesday, Jan. 4, bulletins ceased to be issued.

Confident of Recovery

THE management of the Metropolitan displayed no signs of anxiety. The previous illness due to the rupture of a blood vessel had created far greater consternation. Caruso's quick rally after that incident and his failure to show any signs of ill effects in his subsequent appearances, had stilled apprehension regarding his physical condition. It was confidently expected that the king of tenors would make a speedy recovery from his most recent malady. The period of his absence from the Metropolitan was estimated at about eight weeks. No official utterance was obtainable, but optimism was radiated by the opera attachés. It was hinted that Caruso would sing again in March.

Outside opinions, it is true, were not so roseate. Dr. Francesco Sauchelli, the chiropractor, recalled that an untoward series of events for six years had gradually taxed the tenor's vitality. He had sustained a heavy fall during a performance of "Tosca" in 1916, and had once previously been injured in "Samson et Dalila" a year before his similar accident of last fall.

The public, however, awaited the verdict of the physicians. On Monday, Jan. 10, a bulletin signed by the six attending physicians announced that the tenor was convalescent. "Mr. Caruso's temperature is normal; the surgical condition is under control," read the bulletin.

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Great Tenor Looked Upon United States as "Stepmother Country"

CARUSO'S fondness for the United States was often expressed, sometimes with a droll humor which endeared him to the public. Returning to New York in the autumn of 1917 from a summer season in South America, Caruso landed at the Market Street dock on the East River. His first act, it is said, was to kneel and place his hand upon the ground. Then, rising, he kissed the hand which had been upon the ground, and said: "I am so glad to be back in my stepmother country!"

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