

# Message of Happiness in Caruso's Song

Peoples Unite in Grief at Death of Man of Peace—Little Italy Laments Its Friend and King of Song—Hailed by Popular Vote as Greatest Living Italian—Yearned for Beloved Villa He Never Saw Again

In the following article, Maurice Halperson, the veteran New York critic and friend of Caruso, appraises the artist and the man and gives intimate glimpses of his personality. A previous article by Mr. Halperson, describing a visit to the "Villa Bellosguardo," was published in the issue of June 4 last.—ED. MUSICAL AMERICA.

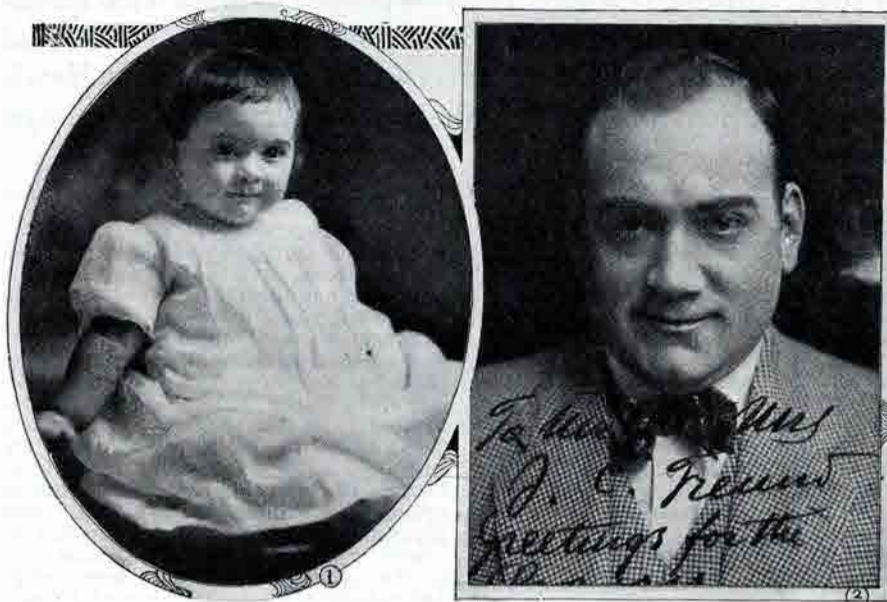
By Maurice Halperson

**A** BOLT of lightning from a clear sky has fallen in a smiling Italian summer landscape, and has stricken its proudest and noblest tree. Enrico Caruso is dead!

His song was the delight and ecstasy, the hope and comfort, the poetry and idealism of our life, a message from a better world. A world which for several years watched the murderous struggle of millions with rage and hatred, and finally with indifference, is now united in grief and mourning for this one man of peace. For Caruso was a sower of joy, a dispenser of the alms of happiness!

In New York's "Little Italy" there were wild scenes of grief, and a chorus of praise to the dead singer: "He was the best man that ever lived!" "Caruso was a bit of paradise!" "Months ago we had decided to buy two good seats for his first reappearance, no matter what the speculators asked!" "My son sent him an ode of praise, and Caruso in return sent him five gold eagles!" "My daughter grew well again in the hospital for which Caruso was never weary of singing!" "I had looked forward, when he returned to New York, to sending him a genuine Neapolitan *pizza*, baked just right, as he liked it!"

When Caruso appeared at some national festival among his own countrymen, and the band struck up the Italian Royal March, "La Fanfara del Re," it seemed no more than right, for the King himself could not have received a more enthusiastic welcome. I remember that at one Italian celebration, paper blanks



Gloria Caruso and Her Father, Portraits Depicting the Remarkable Likeness of the Child to the Great Tenor

were distributed to those present with a request that everyone write down the name of the man whom they considered to be the greatest living Italian. In all 124 of these blanks were distributed; some put down the name of King Victor Emmanuel, a few votes went to D'Annunzio, Marconi, Mascagni, and Puccini—but ninety-seven bore the name of Enrico Caruso. He was "the greatest Italian," *la gloria d'Italia*, the pride of his native land!

## Singing Was Second Nature

**I** WAS always a pessimist concerning Caruso's reappearance on the stage; but I did hope that a few years at least would still be granted to him, a few years of rest, of placid enjoyment. How he yearned to return to his beloved "Villa Bellosguardo"! He was never to see it again, for his advisers first wished to try the curative effects of his own glowing Neapolitan sun, and there the blow fell. Let us be thankful at least, that his dearest wish was fulfilled: that it was given him to die in his own sunny Italian land. And who knows what tortures his sudden death may have spared him. Caruso practised his art with enthusiasm: singing for him was an essential, it was second nature, necessity. Perhaps he might have failed completely, if the sweet solace of song had been entirely denied him.

Years ago I had made up my mind to write Caruso's biography; but Caruso did not seem to relish the idea. "A biography? Why? To please whom?" The great singer was not fond of being caught at his work. Perhaps, because he was by nature somewhat reserved, and on occasion—who knows what his experience may have been—was mistrustful. Or it may be that the mechanism of his own vocal apparatus was a secret to himself. He had no idea how the tone which he sent forth was produced. He did not know how it was to

be projected; he merely sang as the bird sings whose lay flows smoothly and perfectly from his throat. When I insisted, he at last answered; "I have it! The phonograph records shall be my biography and they will be biography enough."

Caruso, despite his genial gifts was a hard worker; he was no Neapolitan *lazzarone*. A sense of duty and endeavor was his guiding star. Not alone every new rôle, but every stage appearance was a source of doubt, of excitement, and of worry to him. He dreaded stepping on the stage, and it was just this fact which gave his art the charm of eternal novelty, which made routine impossible. He looked forward to singing a new rôle with the timidity of a young bride. It was a mixture of expectation and of fulfilment, of sorrow and joy. For a whole day before the performance, as a rule, he was nervous, easily irritated, at times almost insupportable; and before a performance it was dangerous to speak to him. But when the dreaded rôle or number was done with, when his work had been admired in all its wonderful perfection, then his naïve artist soul was filled with a comfort, a self-satisfaction, a plenitude of joy which bubbled over into veritable youthful extravagance. Then we would have some of those caprices and humorous outbreaks which Caruso liked to indulge in when called before the curtain at the close of an act, and which have caused so much amusement, and not infrequently have called forth severe reproof. It was no lack of respect, but merely a discharge of electricity which had gathered in the artist's breast. He could not help himself. This is merely another proof of the fact that we cannot separate the artist from the man.

## A Helping Hand for Beginners

**H**IS colleagues, even the least important among them, found in him an amiable, self-sacrificing friend. Caruso was never a contributor to the luxuriant output of operatic gossip, his sympathies were always with those who were abused and persecuted, and in their defence, he could, at times, be quite outspoken. He lent the aid of his great art to many of his associates, especially beginners, and helped them out of their difficulties. A new *Aida* with a sonorous, bell-like voice would make her début, and lo and behold, Caruso would delight the audience with the fullest deployment of his tone; but a few days later a small, delicate *Gilda* would sing in a *mezza-voce* vibrating with excitement, and her partner, Caruso, as the frivolous *Duke of Mantua*, would tone down his organ to suit the lesser tonal fullness of the other singer. No wonder that all loved and honored him. His charity was open-handed, and he loved to do good by stealth. He was always genuinely annoyed when a reporter discovered some one of his charitable actions and gave it universal publicity.

Will Caruso have a successor, as though he were the president of a national bank or the judge of a night court? Let all the tenors come and elevate, but their song will please and elevate, but none of them will take Caruso's place!

"The Phonograph Records Shall Be My Biography," Tenor Declared—Charm of Novelty in His Art—Self-Sacrificing in Friendship—Great Love of Gloria Illumined His Work—A Memory of "Bellosguardo"

**A**T this time it seems natural to think of the innocent little creature who was the joy and pride of the great singer's last years. Little Gloria, her father's very image. The daughter of this greatest of all vocal artists will have heard her father's voice only at that age during which the voice of father and mother is always the dearest. Gloria! A providential name, and one which hits the nail on the head, for Caruso's glory will survive him.

When Caruso sang the moving romance of the doomed *Eleazar*, this song of songs of a father's love, and sang it in a manner that touched every heart, it always seemed to me as though the smiling face of his child was visioned in the singer's fancy. He was so proud of his child. Laughingly he would praise her singing, whose sweetness he declared, was already noticeable. Would she inherit her father's voice? Neither of his two sons, although their mother is still a famous singer, had a note in his throat. Gloria, Gloria, that was something quite different! And then he told me how musical the baby was—when she cried she would always progress directly to the fifth after her voice had struck the tonic (by the fifth he meant the dominant, one of the pillars of our tonal harmony).

## Song Heard in Moonlight

**A**RT has veiled her face and we weep. Wherever music is made the flag hangs at half-mast, for Caruso's song kissed away the grey monotony of the everyday from the souls of millions, and led their spirits to higher regions. It is not so long ago since I described my visit to Caruso in his Italian Tusculum, the "Villa Bellosguardo," in MUSICAL AMERICA. The evening before my departure, walking in the garden of this paradise on earth by moonlight, I heard the voice of my amiable host from the balcony, where, for himself alone, he was singing *Mario's* "Romance" from the last act of "Tosca," that pathetic farewell to a life which seemed so eminently worth while. And the words of the song ended with a sob: "I must die—and yet I have never loved life so much as now!" It sounded so moving, it appealed so strongly to the heart, just as when Casals makes the A-string of his cello sing some noble melodic line. And I feel and know, and all will understand me, as though with Caruso something rarely beautiful, something precious, had passed from the world—the flowers, the twittering of the birds, the gentle zephyr, the happy laughter of childhood!

## Tenor's Brother-in-Law Sailed for Naples

**R**OMEYN BENJAMIN, brother of Mrs. Enrico Caruso, sailed for Naples on the liner France on Aug. 4 to join his sister in her bereavement. Up to the time of sailing he had received no direct communication from her. Before leaving Mr. Benjamin stated that undue emphasis had been given to the estrangement between Mrs. Caruso and her father, Park Benjamin, Sr., which resulted from her marriage to the tenor. Shortly after the marriage, he said, Mr. Benjamin had invited his daughter and her husband to visit him. Mrs. Caruso responded that she would be glad to have her father call at her home, but would not make the first visit.

Park Benjamin, Jr., another brother of Mrs. Caruso, corroborated the story that his father had no ill feeling toward Mrs. Caruso or her husband. "There has always been a false impression regarding their estrangement," he said.

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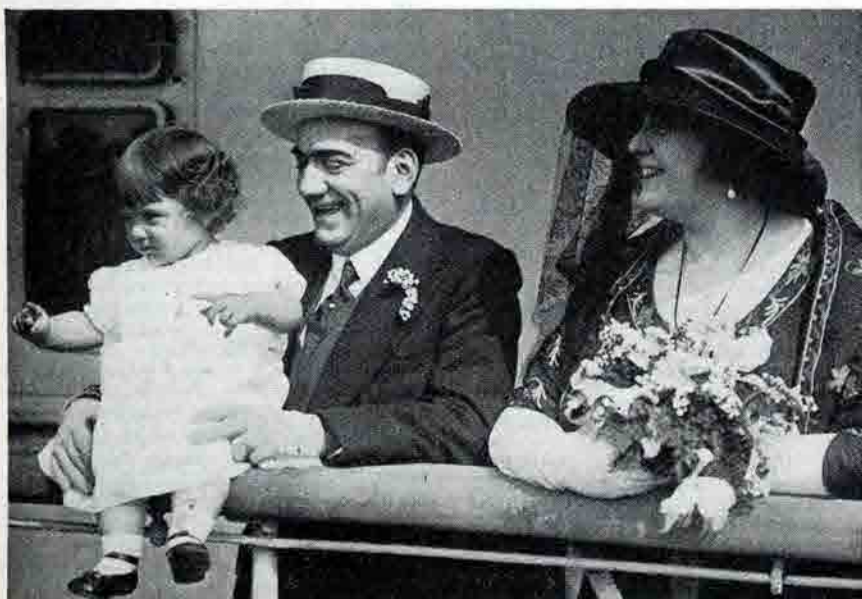


Photo by Central News Photo Service, N. Y.

The Last Picture of Caruso Taken in America, Showing the Tenor, His Wife and Daughter Gloria at the Rail of the Presidente Wilson as They Departed for Italy