

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, 'Poetess of Passion,' Dies

Continued From Page One I do not remember when I did not expect to be a writer, and I was a neighborhood celebrity at the age of eight.

There was nothing in my situation," added this unusually fecund producer of poetry and prose, "to cultivate poetic talent, and I no doubt owe my early development as a poet to that fact, paradoxical as the statement may seem."

Her Literary Debut Despite the discouraging environment that set forth this somber-faced little maid launched her first ship on the literary sea when she was barely thirteen years old.

Success followed fast on early endeavor in the field of literature. First financial reward came from Frank Leslie, who sent a check for \$10 for three little poems from the pen of the Wisconsin maid, and for a period following the publication of these the young author was a local "literary lioness" in social circles.

Pressing need of a larger income prompted her acceptance of a Milwaukee editor's offer of \$45 a month to edit the literary department of his paper, but this employment was short-lived, the venture failing at the end of six months.

"Poems of Passion" Of the publication of "Poems of Passion," which made a stir throughout the country at the time, Mrs. Wilcox wrote in her "Autobiography":

"When publishing 'Maurine' I had purposely omitted more than two score poems of a very romantic nature, in order to save the volume from too much sentiment. Letters began to come to me requesting copies of these verses—ardent love songs which had appeared in various periodicals. This suggested to me the idea of issuing a book of love poems to be called 'Poems of Passion.' To think was to do, for I possessed more activity than caution in those days.

"As just related, every poem in the book had been published in a variety of periodicals and had brought forth no criticism. My amazement can hardly be imagined, therefore, when Jansen & McCling returned the manuscript of my volume, intimating that it was immoral. I told the contents of the letter to friends in Milwaukee and it reached the ears of a sensational morning newspaper. The next day a column article appeared with large headlines: 'Too Loud for Chicago. The Scarlet City by the Lake shocked by a Bangor girl, whose verses out-Swinburne Swinburne and out-Whitman Whitman.'

"POETESS OF PASSION" DIES



ELLA WHEELER WILCOX Author and poetess, whose death occurred this morning at her home in Branford, Conn. She was sixty-four years old

"Every newspaper in the land caught up the story and I found myself an object of unpleasant notoriety in a brief space of time. Writing less than a year ago a revised story of her life for a magazine, under the title, 'The World and I,' Mrs. Wilcox devotes a considerable part of her narrative to this incident, but she never bothered much about standards and formulas of literature, but having something to say she proceeded urged her to destroy the lines which

they said would ruin her reputation if she permitted them to obtain extended vogue. She adds that these predictions were disproved by the event, and she vigorously defended both the text and the purpose of the "Poems of Passion." A writer, commenting on Mrs. Wilcox's success with a large class of readers, said one reason for it was that she never bothered much about standards and formulas of literature, but having something to say she proceeded urged her to destroy the lines which

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her mind and all her feeling." "The Love Sonnets of Abelard and Heloise" furnished an illustration of this when that book made its appearance in 1907. In the intervening years she has been an indefatigable producer alike in poetry and prose, magazines, newspapers and every variety of current literature being filled with her writings. The list of "fans" of various sorts which she took up from time to time is almost illimitable.

She took a conspicuous place in the limelight shortly after America's entrance into the world war by going to France, where for months she entertained the soldiers by reciting poems written on the spur of the moment and inspired by patriotic instinct. Ella became the "beloved of the doughboys," according to one enthusiast, who wrote to a newspaper that the lines she recited for wounded heroes made them her object slave. In one of these poems she wrote of an aviator:

Born in a Wisconsin Town Mrs. Wilcox was born at Johnston Center, Wis., in 1855, the daughter of a farmer named Wheeler and one of four children. Her mother appears to have been a woman of literary temperament, suppressed by surroundings not calculated to develop the artistic faculty. Ella Wheeler had made her start in literary circles before she met Robert M. Wilcox in Chicago in 1883, when she was twenty-nine years old, and when the "Poems of Passion" were still a reigning sensation. Wilcox was a man of wide reading, extensive travel and artistic tastes, and his marriage with Ella, in 1884, proved a most congenial partnership. He died in May, 1916. His widow, writing of their meeting and marriage, stoutly main-

taind that their union was preordained and quoted "spirit messengers" received before she ever met Mr. Wilcox to bear out her declaration. While still a young woman she had given study to the spiritualistic cult, of which she was an ardent follower. Throughout her life Mrs. Wilcox was an extensive traveler, her visit to Europe as a friend of the soldiers being only one of many tours to different parts of the world. She enjoyed social prestige along with the literary distinction, which was as wine to her lips, and in the last three decades of her life she enjoyed more than a competence as the fruit of her labors.

A list of her more pretentious writings, excluding the innumerable verses contributed to the newspaper press and magazines, would make a formidable array. Thirty years ago she made claim to the authorship of the lines beginning "Laugh, and the world laughs with you, and you weep alone."

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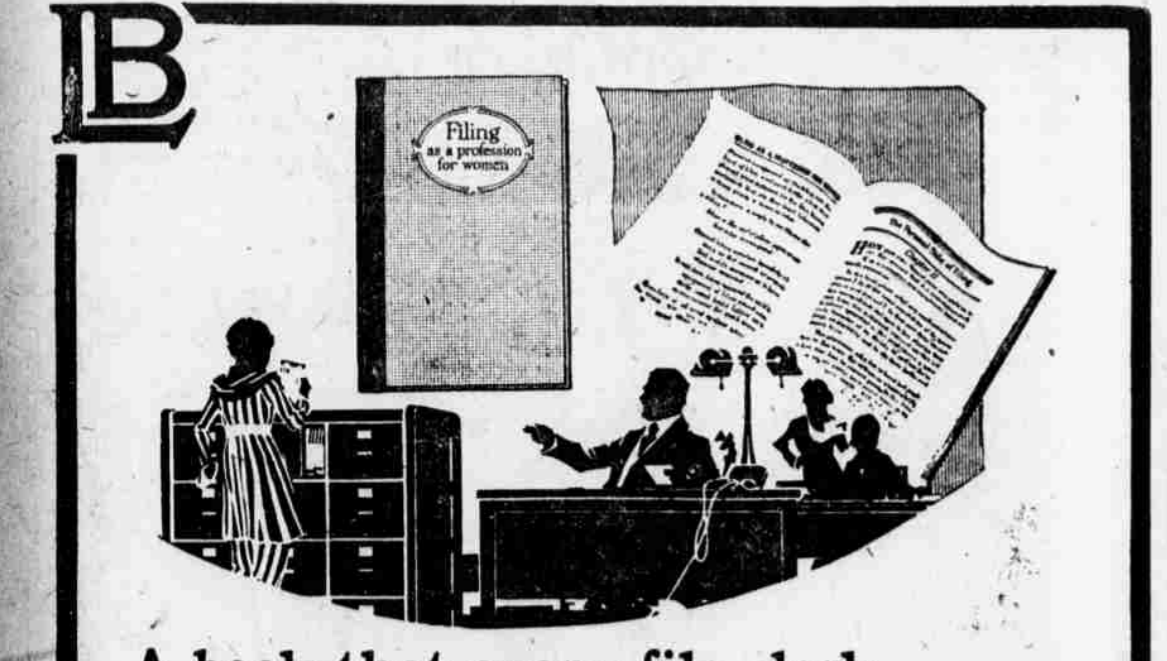
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