

Max Ehrmann

Poet, Prophet, Philosopher

POET when he addresses Indiana as "compassionate mother of a people free", prophet when through the growth of science he sees the super-mentality of man "advance him even to the very kingdom of light," philosopher when he essays that "any idler looking over-much at the stars may think himself a king"—poet, prophet, philosopher—Max Ehrmann is a rare combination of all three and Terre Haute is proud to claim him as her own.

Born in Terre Haute, Mr. Ehrmann, though widely traveled, has continued to reside here where "ambition may all its talent use" and where "the world in miniature" presents a rich variety of interests for all its citizens.

With poetic insight he goes wool gathering among the stars, but with feet firmly on the ground, he looks about him and regrets man's frequent inhumanity to man. In his quest for justice he does not hesitate to censure where censure is due. The rights of the individual are always foremost in his mind, and both in his poetry and in his prose he has courageously expressed himself whenever and wherever the powerful have persecuted the weak. For example, during the World War, Mr. Ehrmann wrote many articles in support of the allied cause. The most widely quoted was the *Portrait of the Kaiser*, first published in the New York Sun, and subsequently reprinted in the newspapers of the allied nations throughout the world.

Mr. Ehrmann graduated from DePauw University and had two years post-graduate work in philosophy at Harvard. While at Harvard he edited the *Rainbow*, national magazine of the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity. On returning to Terre Haute, he began writing. For a number of years, he practiced law, and was Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for one term. Since 1912, he has devoted himself exclusively to his literary work. In September 1910 he was invited to become a member of the Author's Club of London. He is the author of more than twenty books and booklets. Among the most important of his works are *A Fearsome Riddle*, *A Prayer and Selections*, *Breaking Home Ties*, *The Poems of Max Ehrmann*, *A Passion Play*, *The Wife of Marobuis*, *David and Bathsheba*, *Scarlet Women*, *Book of Farces*, *The Bank Robbery* and *The Plumber*.

The most outstanding publication of Mr. Ehrmann is *A Prayer*, the inspiration for which was the following: Nearly a score of years ago Mr. Ehrmann lay ill at Columbia, South Carolina, where he had gone in search of health. One sleepless night when he was in and out of his bed more often than usual, he heard the faint music of a dance across the street from his hotel room. Along with the melody, all the loneliness in the world crept into his soul. Bitterness in a man half alive is not edifying; furthermore it is a dangerous thing. Mr. Ehrmann arose from his bed, far from home, in a strange environment and wrote *A Prayer*, which was somehow marvelously saved by a friend of the poet.

A Prayer was published in 1903. A framed copy was stolen from the Indiana Building at the St. Louis World's Fair, resulting in enormous publicity. The prayer was printed in the Congressional Record February 14, 1909. It has been often translated and set to music. Thousands



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of persons read and love it because work is its creed and love its religion. The author's creed of contentment is embodied in the line, "May I not forget that poverty and riches are of the spirit."

Last year when DePauw celebrated its one hundredth anniversary, Max Ehrmann wrote the Centennial Ode, and this year he received a signal honor, the Doctorate of Literature. He was the tenth person in one hundred years to receive this degree from DePauw.

Mr. Ehrmann has an abiding faith in his fellowmen, and though he is saddened by the many differences that antagonize them, he believes in the millennium where each will work for and with his brother for their mutual good.

Mr. Ehrmann goes about his daily task, quiet and unassuming, loving life with its ups and downs, exulting in the achievements of modern man, preaching the gospel of the good neighbor, but happiest no doubt in the pleasures of a poetic, philosophic mind.

What a precious bit of advice Mr. Ehrmann offers to us all in the lines from *Worldly Wisdom*:

"If you have gathered nothing in the time of youth,
Your later years can be but lonely, sad, uncouth.
Experience is the crown of age.
How comely to gray hair is truth"

Mr. Ehrmann, poet laureate of the Wabash, and prophet with honor in your own town of Terre Haute.
We salute you!