

IN MEMOIRAM
LILIA MARY CASIS

Lilia Mary Casis was born on May 12th, 1869, in Kingston, Jamaica, then as now a British possession. The names of her parents were José Marie Salomé de Casis and Coelestine Auguste Marie Sack. The father was of Spanish and French extraction; the mother was German.

Of the father it is known that he was a man of culture, and that he had been trained for the law. On the mother's side we have more detailed information, in the form of a volume containing a history of the Sack family during the last two centuries, with genealogical tables and some personal details. It lists who distinguished themselves in the service of church and state or otherwise. Of these the one best known to fame is doubtless the zoologist Haeckel. Some members of this family found their way to Texas, and are represented in this state today by a numerous progeny. The Kleberg family may be instanced, which has supplied Congress with two representatives.

Miss Casis attended no preparatory school. From her seventh to her nineteenth year, the date of her father's death, she received private instruction at home, chiefly, it seems, at the hands of her father. The German mother and the French grandmother no doubt made some contribution. An exception was made for mathematics, instruction in which was provided by an English clergyman. The goal appears to have been preparation for some kind of London examination.

The stress was laid upon languages, though other subjects can hardly have been omitted, as indicated by her ability to cope with these when she reached the University. She was trained in the classics, as well as the four modern languages, English, Spanish, French, and German. She had abundant occasion to use the latter throughout her life, and drove her four-horse chariot with great dexterity, which is no small accomplishment. She spoke these languages with little or no confusion of sound or idiom, thus belying the saying that he knows no language who knows more than one.

From her mother, also, she received an elaborate training for the piano. The few who have heard her play testify to her great skill on this instrument. For some obscure reason she ceased to make any use of this talent at an early period, though retaining throughout her life a strong and active interest in all kinds of musical performances.

During the two years following her father's death she engaged in private tutoring, presumably under the necessity of supplementing the income of the little family, now reduced to her mother, her sister and herself. This could hardly have been

her coup d'essai, as it was one of her innocent boasts that at the age of fourteen she had given lessons in French and Spanish to persons much older and larger than herself.

In 1890 the three women emigrated to Texas. This momentous step was taken on the advice of some relatives who had settled in this state. The mother died during the second year in the new country. For the two sisters the first four years proved a difficult period, which brought many disappointments. They supported themselves chiefly by teaching, but were sometimes driven to other expedients. For a part of this time Miss Casis taught in the little town of Warrenton, in Payette County.

Finally a happy inspiration and some friendly assistance directed her steps toward The University of Texas, which she entered in the fall of 1894. She may be said to have captured the University by storm. The courses, for which she registered, added to the credits, which she secured by examinations for advanced standing, enabled her to obtain the Bachelor's degree at the end of her first year. The following year she was awarded a fellowship in Romance Languages, and completed the work for the Masters degree. In 1896 she was appointed a Tutor in Romance Languages, and thus began her long career as a teacher at the University, which was to continue a full half-century. She became an Instructor in 1897, an Adjunct Professor in 1899, an Associate Professor in 1908, and a Full Professor, in 1916, in the administration of President Battle.

She attended summer quarters of the University of Chicago in 1897, 1898 and 1903. In those days these summer faculties regularly included outstanding scholars from other universities. Those whose courses she took were impressed by her ability and personality, and their respect for her was frequently evidenced in succeeding years.

She obtained a leave of absence for the year 1907-1908, which she spent in France and Spain. In Paris she attended lectures at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, at the College de France, and at the Sorbonne. She received personal guidance from Menéndez Pidal in Madrid, and from Mario Roques and Martinenche in Paris. These were among the famous names of that day in the field of Romance studies.

It may be regretted that she did not engage in research, for which she was eminently equipped by taste, training and ability. However some temerity is required to suggest that she might have been better occupied than in the things which she did do.

The esteem of some of our early presidents for Miss Casis did not always result to her advantage. In 1919, in the administration of President Vinson, she was appointed Dean of Women for a period of two years. She succeeded Mrs. Kirby,

and it may have been at Mrs. Kirby's request that she reluctantly accepted the position. It is well known that for the imported teacher the American youth remains a riddle more difficult than the problems, which he propounds, can ever be to his pupils. It is remarkable that a woman of foreign birth and training should have been deemed to possess the understanding and tact required for this difficult position. The swift current of change, which could not be stemmed, was probably less painful to her than to Mrs. Kirby. The younger woman could more easily persuade herself that it was a change in conventions. She had not waited for this opportunity to supply sympathy and counsel where they might be needed. But in this position example is no doubt more potent than words. Example had been the source of Mrs. Kirby's strength, and in this respect Miss Casio was hardly inferior to her predecessor.

It seems scarcely necessary to ask with what success she taught, if it be known that she entered into this work with infinite zest, with true sympathy for her students, and with abounding knowledge of her subject. One of her students writes of her: "It was my good luck to have many excellent teachers and a few great ones at Texas and Columbia. In more than one respect she was the finest of the lot. No one in our profession could aspire to greater honor and satisfaction than the respect and affection that she earned from so many students and associates."

It was characteristic of her that she always took for herself a larger number of teaching hours than she was willing to see assigned to other members of the department. She took a strong interest in the teaching of elementary courses. She entered eagerly into the endless quest for a method of teaching a foreign language at a small cost of time and work to the learner, though this is clearly no part of nature's plan. The various panaceas were tried, and courses in rapid reading were offered, and courses in which the student was allowed to see the foreign language in phonetic transcription only, and courses in which the foreign language only was used, and courses in which object lessons were stressed, and for which the teacher provided himself with an armful of pictures and models.

Her advanced courses were chiefly in the field of linguistics and in the classical period of Spanish literature. Her course on Cervantes received special praise. She was prepared to appreciate to the full the noble folly of Don Quixote and the robust good sense of his servant. For with a strong sense of realities and a keen appraisal of motive she combined a predilection for the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century and an interest in books on moral and religious subjects, which sometimes taxed her pastor to keep abreast of her.

She supervised from forty to fifty Master's theses and five or six Doctor's dissertations. This work was done with scrupulous care.

Many years ago Judge Townes bore witness to the value of her services on committees. "Perhaps no other individual has served on a larger number of important committees, both standing and special. In a situation of difficulty or responsibility all expect Miss Casis to be appointed. If her name is included, all her associates are glad; if not, they feel the loss." A candid mind, eager to be informed, and devoid of, prejudice and thought of self, must have simplified many problems.

She had been brought up in the Catholic Church. In the course of time she ceased to be an active member. For some time she remained a reverent person without, a church. Finally, some thirty years ago she joined the University Methodist Church; not without misgivings, as she found it necessary to explain to the pastor that she might not be found to be like some members of his flock. It is not clear whether she found reassurance in his reply: "God forbid!" In any case her fear proved groundless, and she established herself firmly in the high approval and in the affection of the pastor and the congregation.

She was generous in the support of good causes. For the most part her gifts were known to few, and could not easily be enumerated. Her loans to students appear to have been duly repaid, as seems to be the rule in such cases. She bequeathed the sum of five thousand dollars to the University for the establishment of a scholarship.

She was not sentimental or expensive; but her emotions are revealed in the tender lines, which she wrote in memory of Miss Jessie Andrews and Mrs. Kirby. Sadness and disillusionment came to her when the old idyllic picture of Germany, still strong in the minds of her generation, had been blotted out by the reality of Germany at war.

She had no great relish for barbed witticisms, but she had a sense of humor, which she kept in check. On rare occasions, when certain incongruities passed the limit of endurance, or when students taxed her patience, it might manifest itself, sometimes with startling effect, coming from one so mild. To a minister who had performed the funeral services for a man not noted for his religious zeal, she said: Well, I see that you have taken care of old Mr. X." On a day following a holiday, the class having confessed its inability to deal with the text, she turned to

one of the resourceful members: "Miss Y, will you please take it? You are a good guesser." But there was no malice and no sting. It was not her custom to find a fault when she could not find a remedy.

In her later years she suffered from sickness and accident in various forms. These she ignored, when possible; when they could not be ignored, she endured them with stoicism. A strong spirit held a frail body to its work much longer than seemed possible, until the end of her life.

She survived by a few months her sister, who had been her life-long companion. She died peacefully on October 19th, 1947. Having served the University with all her strength and all her love, it was natural that she should ask to be buried in her uniform, the Master's gown, which she had received from the University.

Miss Casis, belonged to the company of those of whom fortune heaps some of its best gifts: good will toward all men, generosity and gentleness, a simple earnestness, and self-effacement; those qualities in which, today, a world confused and full of fear dimly glimpses a hope of salvation. To such as she there is not usually granted a wide audience. The University may rejoice when it supplies a field in which they come into their own. By the older alumni and members of the University her name will be linked with those of Judge Clark and Judge Townes and Mrs. Kirby, who, like her, were loved for their humanity, their obvious good faith and their simplicity of heart. To those who remember her through long years, engaged in the faithful and unassuming performance of her tasks, there may come to mind the lines of Dante, addressed to Beatrice:

"Though praise be heard, she goeth on her way
In blessed garment of humility."

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