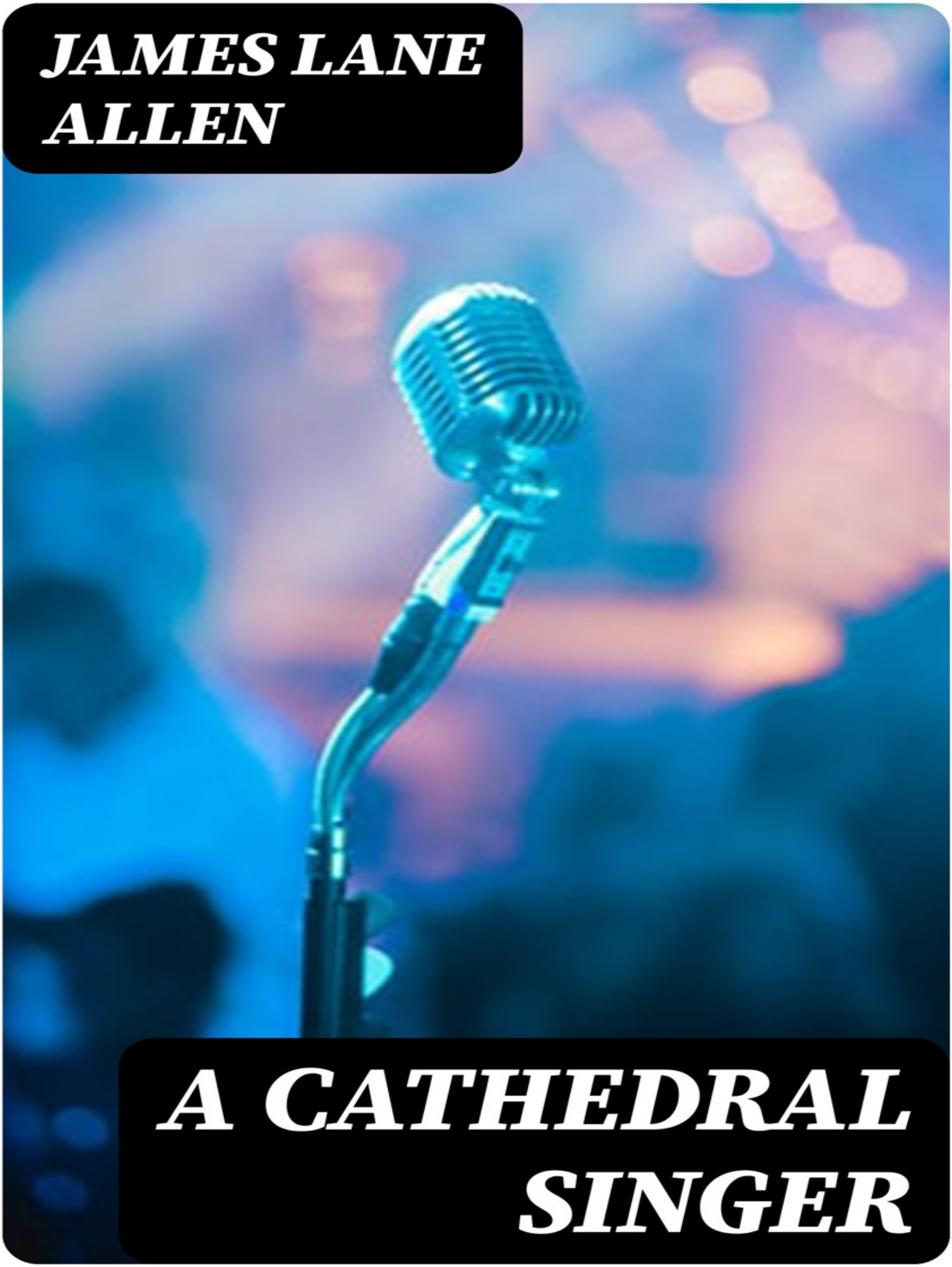
JAMES LANE ALLEN



A CATHEDRAL SINGER

James Lane Allen

A Cathedral Singer

EAN 8596547361138

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

Chapters: I II III IV V VI

A Cathedral Singer

I

Table of Contents

Slowly on Morningside Heights rises the Cathedral of St. John the Divine: standing on a high rock under the Northern sky above the long wash of the untroubled sea, above the wash of the troubled waves of men.

It has fit neighbors. Across the street to the north looms the many-towered gray-walled Hospital of St. Luke—cathedral of our ruins, of our sufferings and our dust, near the cathedral of our souls.

Across the block to the south is situated a shed-like two-story building with dormer-windows and a crumpled three-sided roof, the studios of the National Academy of Design; and under that low brittle skylight youth toils over the shapes and colors of the visible vanishing paradise of the earth in the shadow of the cathedral which promises an unseen, an eternal one.

At the rear of the cathedral, across the roadway, stands a low stone wall. Just over the wall the earth sinks like a precipice to a green valley bottom far below. Out here is a rugged slope of rock and verdure and forest growth which brings into the city an ancient presence, nature—nature, the Elysian Fields of the art school, the potter's field of the hospital, the harvest field of the church.

This strip of nature fronts the dawn and is called Morningside Park. Past the foot of it a thoroughfare stretches northward and southward, level and wide and smooth. Over this thoroughfare the two opposite-moving streams of the city's traffic and travel rush headlong. Beyond the thoroughfare an embankment of houses shoves its mass before the eyes, and beyond the embankment the city spreads out over flats where human beings are as thick as river reeds.

Thus within small compass humanity is here: the cathedral, the hospital, the art school, and a strip of nature, and a broad highway along which, with their hearth-fires

flickering fitfully under their tents of stone, are encamped life's restless, light-hearted, heavy-hearted Gipsies.

It was Monday morning and it was nine o'clock. Over at the National Academy of Design, in an upper room, the members of one of the women's portrait classes were assembled, ready to begin work. Easels had been drawn into position; a clear light from the blue sky of the last of April fell through the opened roof upon new canvases fastened to the frames. And it poured down bountifully upon intelligent young faces. The scene was a beautiful one, and it was complete except in one particular: the teacher of the class was missing—the teacher and a model.

Minutes passed without his coming, and when at last he did enter the room, he advanced two or three steps and paused as though he meant presently to go out again. After his usual quiet good-morning with his sober smile, he gave his alert listeners the clue to an unusual situation:

"I told the class that to-day we should begin a fresh study. I had not myself decided what this should be. Several models were in reserve, any one of whom could have been used to advantage at this closing stage of the year's course. Then the unexpected happened: on Saturday a stranger, a woman, came to see me and asked to be engaged. It is this model that I have been waiting for down-stairs."

Their thoughts instantly passed to the model: his impressive manner, his respectful words, invested her with mystery, with fascination. His countenance lighted up with wonderful interest as he went on:

"She is not a professional; she has never posed. In asking me to engage her she proffered barely the explanation which she seemed to feel due herself. I turn this explanation over to you because she wished, I think, that you also should not misunderstand her. It is the fee, then, that is needed, the model's wage; she has felt the common lash of the poor. Plainly here is some one who has stepped down from her place in life, who has descended far below her inclinations, to raise a small sum of money. Why she does so is of course her own sacred and delicate affair. But the spirit in which she does this becomes our affair, because it becomes a matter of expression with her. This self-sacrifice, this ordeal which she voluntarily undergoes to gain her end, shows in her face; and if while she poses, you should be fortunate enough to see this look along with other fine things, great things, it will be your aim to transfer them all to your canvases—if you can."

He smiled at them with a kind of fostering challenge to their over-confident impulses and immature art. But he had not yet fully brought out what he had in mind about the mysterious stranger and he continued:

"We teachers of art schools in engaging models have to take from human material as we find it. The best we find is seldom or never what we would prefer. If I, for instance, could have my choice, my students would never be allowed to work from a model who repelled the student or left the student indifferent. No students of mine, if I could have my way, should ever paint from a model that failed to call forth the finest feelings. Otherwise, how can your best emotions have full play in your work; and unless your best emotions