

THE PASSING SHOW

Those Zenda stories by Anthony Hope that are appearing in *McClure's* are really very diverting, and they afford one an excellent opportunity to study the character, or rather the characteristics of the Princess Orsa, for to her and to her various intangible love affairs they seem to be entirely devoted. Now the princess is somewhat of a Bohemian and thoroughly plucky. She visited Stephen, the silversmith, at an hour when it is not customary for ladies to call on gentlemen, and she masqueraded as a peasant girl for her social high wayman and afterward was considerate enough to give him her red stockings as a souvenir. She calmly stakes herself against the castle of Zenda and plays dice with Count Nikolas, and when we last heard of her she coolly went forth to woo the indifferent miller of Hofbau. The princess is enterprising or nothing. And the most wonderful thing about her is her versatility and her Catholic tastes. She was mildly in love with them all and did not deny it. She managed even to conjure up feelings of tenderness for the miller in his red cap. But all her flames are so impossible and intangible. A smith, a highwayman, a priest and a miller. Now there are to be six Zenda stories, so the princess has two more chances, and I am afraid in one of these rounds she may get the worst of it. She has almost exhausted the varieties of impossible men, unless she tries a married man and a tenor. She will have to do something like that, for it would be against Mr. Hope's principles to let anything definite come to pass. He never does. He never gives any particular reason why they should not, but he makes the conditions hostile, and his heroes and heroines are latter day folks and are never strong enough or foolish enough to fight existing conditions. So they never get anywhere. Neither will the Princess Orsa. She will probably keep on having adventures until the end of time and die a respected spinster.

I picked up another book by Pierre Loti the other day. It is called "The Romance of a Spahi," and it is just the kind of a book that Loti always writes and that no other man on earth can write. The story is simple and soon told. Jean Peyral was drafted for a soldier and taken away from his mother and little betrothed and his mountain village, up in the Cevennes, and taken to Africa, to old Saint Louis of the Senegal. He was only a boy from the mountains and life in the tropics told on him the heat and the homesickness, the glaring lights and the eternal flatness of the desert. He had an affair with a mulatress, the wife of a trader, a woman who had lived in Paris, who was at once violent and cunning, as wise as Europe, as cruel as Africa. She betrayed him and he was sent to the hospital. It was his first experience, and he had it hard. When he was well again the loneliness was worse than ever and he took to the blacks and the devil. He took a black slave girl to live with him, a girl with big eyes and shapely arms and lips like a red cactus flower, one of the most beautiful women of the Senegal. She was a little captive from the land of Gallam, the land of ivory and gold.

He grew to be a model soldier, the Jean, brave and prompt, and a man of honor, but his connection with a black woman forever shut him from all chance of promotion. At last one day toward the close of his exile, his regiment was ordered to Algeria, that meant one step nearer home, freedom from the black woman and a visit to the old peasant father and mother, who, up in their mountain village, were growing old with waiting for their boy. But just before they took boat an old comrade rushed in and begged Jean to let him go in his place. The black woman begged and there was a scene, and Jean gave it up. Africa had done its work, had wrought the fatal destruction that the tropics always brings upon men from the mountains. He was bound to this desert land that he hated, to this woman he despised. She had charmed him with her amulets, thrown a spell over him by her savage chants. This is the climax of the book, the tragic force, then everything clears for the catastrophe, for even in their novels the French are dramatic. Things go from bad to worse; the slave girl sells Jean's old watch that his father gave him the day he marched away with the other village boys, singing bravely to keep back the tears. He drives her away, but she comes back as they always do, and she takes her back, as they always do, for with her she brings a little child, half white, that has Jean's eyes and that never smiles.

Just before the time of Jean's home going there is a battle. The night before the encounter he dreams of his mother and the mountains and of his betrothed, who has married another man. For he is only a little peasant of the Cevennes masquerading in a fez and red uniform, who is living wrongly because France has put him where nature did not intend him to be. Next day he was killed, run through the breast, and dragged himself under the shade of a tamarind tree to die. When the slave girl hears that he has "gained paradise," she goes out among the dead and finds him. She strangles his child by filling its mouth with sand, and stretching herself upon his body, takes a poison she had bought of an African priest, and dies. In his hand the man held a silver image of the Virgin, his parents had tied about his neck in far away France; in her hand the woman held the amulet of leather her black mother had given her when she was carried away a captive from Gallam. "Guard them well, O precious amulets!"

At night the watchers came, the only watchers who ever sit by the dead who fall in the Soudan; first the jackals, then the vultures, then the winds and the bleaching sands of the desert.

That is all there is of the story, all the rest is description, environment. But ah, such description! All English description is odious. Careful, accurate, burdened with irrelevant detail, lifeless, leaving no picture in the reader's mind. But with the French it is a different matter. They write as they paint, to bring out an effect. All through this book one can smell the aroma of the tropics, see the palms and the tamarinds and the old white mosques, and the burning sandy water of the Senegal, hear the sound of the tom-tom and the epic chants of the *girots*. The language is simple, simple as the savage life it pictures, intense as the savage emotions it portrays. It is a tragedy of environ-

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