

Rhea played to a fairly good house at the Funke on Wednesday night, though the play, the company and the star deserved better. Travelling companies have fallen on evil times. The best of them have learned to accept meager appreciation.

Edmund O'Connor played Charles II., "the king that never said a foolish thing nor ever did a wise one," a trifle heavily. Charles took the world lightly. He was ironical, witty and ever irresponsible. His business was amusement. At rare moments, for recreation or to keep his mind in training, he lifted the burdens of state, exercised with them for a while—as a beau plays with dumb bells—found them too heavy and quickly laid them down. Green says: "The one thing he seemed in earnest about was pleasure." * * * * "The royal bastards were set among English nobles. The ducal house of Grafton, the dukes of St. Albans, are the descendants of Nell Gwynne, Louise de Querouaille is ancestress of the house of Richmond and the dukes of Buccleuch trace their origin to Lucy Walters. In his earlier days when his throne was to gain, Prince Charlie showed ability, courage, persistence and "a presence of mind which never failed him in the many perilous moments of his reign."

But in the English court were "some in rags and some in jags, and some in velvet gowns," on Wednesday night at the Funke. Rochester's white satin doublet and hose were white only because the audience knew from experience that white turns an ashes of roses streaked with ecru when it is very, very old and experienced. Rochester wore his sheen with the opulent grace and hauteur of a feudal lord. The king had only one suit which he wore on the street, in the theatre, at court and in his wife's ante-chamber. I thought for the last place he might have worn a smoking jacket, especially as the satin coat begins to show wear and Nell Gwynn was giving away his money £3,000 pounds at a time. The lord chief justice's long red plush robe that is supposed to be an historical garment, which judicial intriguants wore when they sentenced their enemies to death with s'blood and s'death and Odds fish I can believe was the real one that Jeffries wore about the year 1680. The players wore their garments with a courtly grace and unconsciousness that was a moral lesson in itself. Rhea's Nell Gwynn is a creature all fire and flame, impulse and tact. She is beautiful, graceful, and would be fascinating if she did not shriek so loud. A woman cannot be seductive and caressing with her lungs inflated like a bellows. Go to Barnhardt Rhea, and learn of her. Her voice carries to the furthestmost parts of the room—yet it is soft and scented as a summer night, caressing, and reminding all who hear it. Rhea's voice, in itself is of a pleasant quality, but she does not use the loud pedal with discretion. Her incomplete control of English consonants prevents some from understanding her. Others enjoy her broken English. Her th's, sw's and ch's were interesting to me.

I am always grateful to a foreign actress if she tries to speak in English. No two brogues are quite alike and the expedient of every new experimenter is amusing and is ever after an unfalling means of identification. I know I have failed to do justice to Rhea's grace, sweetness and magnetism, but that is one of the faults of criticism—it exaggerates the faults and takes for granted the merits.

The play is a good one, but most conventional. It contains no new or unexpected situations. More than all it lacks the atmosphere of the Seventeenth century. To live in time past is the privilege of those who go to see "The Rivals," or "Beau Brummel." "Nell Gwynne" lacks mustiness, remoteness. The courtiers were modern gentlemen in masquerade and the king a player of king. "Nell Gwynne" herself was a hundred years behind them, but she did not take me as far back as historical accuracy and roaming inclination demanded. A fault in construction is the non-reappearance of Nell's player friends after the second act.

S. B. H.

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