

THE PASSING SHOW
WILLA CATHER

THE PLAYER'S RUBAIAT.

"Dear John! A bird, that's not
to old or new,
And lo's of chilly first to drink, and you
in some gay corner of Martin's place,
Say, wouldn't that be bliss enough
for two?"

"Though some there are who
talk of 'art' and that,
And some there be would sit
where Bernhardt sat,
Ah! let us blow our cash and
dodge our duns,
And let the critic murmur
through his hat."

"For some who wore the laurel
on their brow,
And talked of 'consecration'—
well, I trow
They lie asleep in some sequestered spot,
And Della Fox is burning money now."

—From Johnstone Bennett's Autograph Album.

She had been with us again, jovial, natty Johnnie Bennett, a hall-fellow well-met, and the trimmest tailor-made New Woman of them all. She is another one who has learned how to cheat time: her cheeks are just as ruddy and her big gray eyes as frank and frolicsome and boyish as they were in the days of "Jane," eight or nine years ago. While she was here she had an abscess on her toe, an unromantic affliction, but a very painful one, and every night she would force her swollen foot into her russet boots, half fainting with pain, and five minutes later would be skipping and dancing about the stage of the Bijou theatre as gay as a schoolboy on his holiday. For downright grit, just give me these professional women. I have seen Lizzie Hudson Collier faint dead away in the wings where she stood waiting for her cue, and then go on and dance radiantly beautiful at an embassy ball, and Olga Nethersole leave the doctor's hands to go on for the 3rd act of Camille, and Annie Russell chatter beside the chilly fire-side of a drawing room "set" when her throat was full of bronchitis. Death is the only excuse which the stage manager will accept, and then he is inclined to grumble because the funeral was not postponed until the end of the season.

Last Friday evening Moritz Rosenthal played at the Carnegie music hall with the Pittsburg symphony orchestra, of which Victor Herbert, author of the "Wizard of the Nile," is conductor. Mr. Rosenthal played several of his own compositions, so preposterously difficult of execution that probably no other living pianist would care to attack them. The piece de resistance of his program, however, was Chopin's famous Concerto in E Minor with orchestral accompaniment, which has been so cleverly edited and adapted and exemplified that it affords just the opportunity for an absolute master of the keyboard like Rosenthal to bewilder his auditors. I believe it is esteemed one of the noblest compositions in all the literature of the piano. Ethelbert Nevin styles it an apotheosis of the instrument. I believe the Largo movement has suffered less from editing and interpolation and has retained more of the original poetry of Chopin than the Allegro and Rondo, and it was in that, that Rosenthal exhibited his wonderful pianissimo effects. In those involved, intricate melodies, more delicate than the strands of a spider's web or the fantastic traceries of the frost upon the window pane, a mere lacework of sound, the pianist displayed all those subtleties of execution whereby he fairly illuminates a composition. He takes up a pianissimo passage and actually whistles it down until it is but a ghost of sound, a mere breath of the strings. Through-

out the romance he used the soft pedal almost continually, checking the vibrations of the notes sharply, skimming the surface of the tones, making tone bubbles, as it were. Surely this man has in a wonderful degree that element of classic grace which so distinguishes Joseffy. That quality strode out above all others in his exquisitely simple phrasing of the passage in the latter part of the Allegro, which is accompanied only by the melancholy French horns. Heavens! what variety there is in that composition! what brilliant runs, what ravishing melodies, what dazzling passages of bravura, what whispering of the strings wierd and sweet as the music of a wind-harp. So delicately does Rosenthal intone those softer passages that we seemed indeed to hear "the borne of elf-land faintly blowing." The Rondo was executed without the elision of a note, the runs fairly whistling after each other, and the marvellous finale was played with a brilliancy, a depth, a crashing, impetuous power which completely subordinated an orchestra of sixty pieces. After nine scores Mr. Rosenthal played the Chopin waltz that Paderewski always plays, but in a very different manner, making thirds and sixths out of those charming runs, as Joseffy always does.

In his personal appearance this Herr Rosenthal suggests a Polish workman rather than an artist. Be not deceived by his leonine photographs. He is a short, thickly built man with the shoulders of a porter and a shaggy unkempt head of hair. His clothes are rumpled and ill-fitting and he does not even take the trouble to brush the cigarette ashes from his coat when he enters the concert room. At the hotel where he stopped they tremble at his name. Well, if one were a Rosenthal one could afford to have all the carpets pulled up from one's rooms, and the curtain torn down and the furniture fired into the corridor, and even to empty a lobster Newburg down the waiter's neck if it pleased one to do so.

These seem to be the days of the revival of the fittest. Every actor who can thrust and parry or mutter "par blue" is "producing" Dumas' "Three Musketeers," which, added up, of course, make four. Dumas' arithmetic was always too deep for me. But then I was once conditioned in mathematics. Now it is Mr. Eddie Sothorn who aspires to the fiery Gascon. With much flaunting of befeathered hats and sweeping of velvet trains and tumbling of cardinal corpses he opened his dazzling edition de luxe of the play at the Alvin theatre here. He has staged the piece with a reckless magnificence calculated to strike dumb the humble spectator accustomed to service worn evening apparel and meagre drawing room "sets." The costuming is one of Hermann's triumphs. I had tea with the veteran costumer when I was in New York, up in his queer little rooms full of armor and "settles" and quaint cabinets and old laces and brocades, and the little Frenchman with the oily black wig told me of the ineffable pleasure it afforded him to clothe Mme. Modjecka's queenly figure and Otis Skinner's kingly legs, and confided to me that Shakspeare was his passion. He is the first costumer in America, and he has done his best for Mr. Eddie Sothorn. The scenes follow each other in bewildering succession, each a gorgeous picture of the gayest court and the gayest capital of Europe. The ladies have gowns unlimited, the gentlemen never appear twice in the same attire. The feminine portion of the audience, which is needless to say, was large, gave little fluttering gasps of pure happiness at Mr. Sothorn's beautiful clothes. The play, of course, is only another version of "The Three Guardsmen." Dear me!

How often will the immortal and peerless vintage of old Dumas be served up to us, and under how many names. How mightily does that virile and fecund genius hold its own through all the shifting changes and innovations of the drama, how we are driven again and again to beg or borrow from its teeming vigor! Though Mr. Sothorn's production of "The Three Musketeers" out-rides in splendor all former American presentations of the play, the new adaptation by Mr. Henry Hamilton is not a happy one. "The Three Guardsmen," as originally presented, was a drama suggested by a romance. Mr. Hamilton's version is that bane of the modern theatre, a dramatized novel. The interest of the play originally centered in "Anne of Austria's" intrigue with Buckingham, the devotion of the musketeers to her cause, "d'Artagnan's" quest for the recovery of her diamonds. And with their recovery, the queen's rescue and "Richelieu's" defeat, the piece naturally ends. Not content with so finely dramatic and sufficient a plot, Mr. Hamilton has tried to swallow the entire novel. The splendid scene in "Buckingham's" ship, and the inn scene, so essential to the strongest treatment of the plot, are cut out to make room for two fat and unprofitable acts which follow the recovery of the diamonds and the natural end of the play. Acts which have no dramatic sequence or justification, are woefully in the nature of an anti-climax, and which accomplish nothing save to give "Anne of Austria" an opportunity to be lamentably silly and tearful, and "Lady de Winter" a chance to indulge still further in resplendent gowns and to hack the scenery to pieces with a dagger. "Lady de Winter" in this instance happens to be played by a gifted actress and superbly handsome woman, Edith Crane, but all the same that is no reason why, after the play is done and over, she should have two entire acts to flit about dusky boudoirs in a robe de nuit, flirt with a palm-singing Puritan, drink Borgias poisons and mutilate the scenery. The interest of the piece ends with the third act; the rest is gratuitous melodrama that cheapens the entire dramatic personae and quite robs poor "Anne of Austria" of her dignity.

After the end of the diamond episode, Mr. Sothorn's version of the play takes up Lady de Winter's plot to kill Buckingham and d'Artagnan. D'Artagnan enters the lady's apartments at night disguised as one of her lovers—just as though that wily lady couldn't have told the difference—and makes furious love to her in Sothorn fashion, and wheedles from her the details of her plan. Then he discloses his identity and she attempts to kill him with her dagger—it seems she always wore one, even in her night dress—d'Artagnan draws his sword and a most unequal and ungallant duel follows. Finally d'Artagnan makes his escape through a door and Lady de Winter, wounded and half mad, proceeds to stab the canvas door again and again, making horrid gashes in the nice new scenery. Then her attendants rush in and she falls to the floor, dead to all appearances, and you feel confident that the world and the play are well rid of her, and begin to wonder whose career the next act will take up. But alas for vain hopes! in the next act she appears more radiant than ever in a purple velvet gown so beautiful that it almost justifies that crazy, superfluous act, and a hat that is the most genuinely artistic feature of the play. She comes to the convent where d'Artagnan has hidden away his silly little sweetheart, to persuade that trusting maid that, although she has kidnapped her and shut her up in the Bastille in the fourth act, she is her best and dearest friend, and to inveigle her to fly with her. Now you wonder

vaguely that the Lady de Winter when she is pleading "O come at once, fly with me, there is no time to lose," should calmly proceed to take off her imposing hat. It is not suggestive of instant flight. But soon the mystery is made clear, when the three musketeers—who are still four—enter and foil her fendish plans and the noble Athos compels her to drink a Borgias poison, then you realize that her dying agonies would prove fatal to that triumph of millinery, and though our mortal bodies die, yet shall our hats live.

Mr. Sothorn's company is excellent throughout. Dumas' spirited characters have seldom been more worthily played. The appearance of "Raoul d'Artagnan" as Mr. E. A. Sothorn could not be otherwise than interesting, even if a little incongruous. What a soulful, serious, sentimental Gascon this! What an ardent, fervidly romantic fellow has this roistering daredevil become! What impassioned intensity has this effervescent, hot headed, irresponsible Latin cultivated! I think in this case Dumas would agree that it is a wise father who knows his own child. Mr. Sothorn's forte is his intensity; in the most impossible and strained situations he can make you believe in his sincerity. Nature has endowed him with a pair of soulful eyes—great bow-windows of the soul—which are capable of looking unspeakable anguish for hours together and which would deceive the elect themselves. He takes his amorous woes and his caramel heroics with an awful, shuddering seriousness. And this is all very fine, but it is scarcely the Gascon temperament. Imagine d'Artagnan with the Sothorn eyes and the Sothorn sigh and the Sothorn quiver and the Sothorn "sweetheart." O'ast impossible! Mr. Sothorn is an actor of parts, but he is out of his atmosphere in Gascony. In short, his d'Artagnan" is impassioned where he was wont to be gay, fervid where he was wont to be gallant, heroic where he was wont to be impudent, sincere where he was wont to be boastful, sober where he was wont to be drunk, and suffers generally from an enlargement of the soul.

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