

THE PASSING SHOW

There are plenty of people of good taste who do not find De Wolf Hopper excruciatingly funny, and it is rather difficult to say just what there is about him that makes one feel so cheerful. I am inclined to think that it is not so much anything that he does, as he himself, his big, genial personality. I never can think he is acting on the stage, but just sort of improvising and being jolly. I like to watch him when he is not doing anything in particular, when he is just riding his elephant and awaiting the will of providence to dismount, when he is waltzing with the children, or getting married and rocking himself to and fro in helpless despair. And by the way, that despair has a decidedly comic element of its own. It is so absolute, so complete, so all embracing, and generally so uncalculated for. And what is the matter with Mrs. Hopper? It would be treason to say that she was any better than Della Fox, but she certainly was quite as audacious without being so impudent. She uses her smile and her eye in the approved light opera fashion and manages to do it without being bold or giddy a bit. Like her husband, she seems to play for the fun there is in it and to be blessed with a good nature that is boundless and endless.

Of all the "attractions" that are running in New York just now, it is "The Prisoner of Zenda" that is turning away people every night because the Lyceum theatre cannot hold all the people in New York at once. We seem to be drifting back to the older and more healthful style of drama in which men act instead of talking about the futility of action, in which men have hearts and hands instead of nerves and inherited tendencies. Things look a little black for the stage now and then when plays like "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" get the upper hand. The critics get blue and say that all the strength and sincerity are going out of the drama. Just now, when the "end of the century" feeling has its undoubted influence, both literature and the drama look discouraging. But the critics need not lose sleep over it. Such things have been in the past and will be in the future, and humanity will always go back to the best. Even if one has not much faith in men individually one should believe in them collectively. Truth has such a confirmed habit of prevailing that it is not going to fail us now. Humanity has always recovered itself, after its maddest debauches, after most austere asceticisms, and whatever a man's faith may be he can not doubt the wisdom of that great hand that shapes the destiny of the nations. We say, "but if these things go on, if all women and all men look at morality as merely a relative thing, and at virtue or a myth and a fable, what will become of the world?" If, but they will not. Humanity is always rushing to its own destruction, but it never quite accomplishes it.

In Rome, at one time, it looked as though marriage and the family were things of the past. Later, in the first exaggerated zeal of the church, when St. Ursula alone had forty thousand virgins in her convents, it was

thought that the race would die out altogether. In the days of the robber barons men said that chaos had come to stay. But none of these things was true. We are always taking temporary tendencies of humanity and regarding them as final. But the final tendencies and destiny are in the keeping of a greater hand than ours, of that great intelligence, who, when the Roman world had corrupted the civilization it had made, enslaved the state it had freed, grown monstrous in its pleasures, had the barbarian races ready to destroy and renew, brought down the snows of the Danube to cool the heated blood of the south, and the great hammer of Thor to crush the defile, atlars of Aphrodite into dust. Humanity cannot utterly blast itself, even when it tries. Some day, perhaps, when our civilization has grown too utterly complex, when our introspection cuts off all action, when our forms have killed all ambition, when sincerity and simplicity have utterly gone from us and we are only a bundle of nerves, then the savage strength of the Slav or the Bushmen will come upon us and will burn our psychologies and carry us away into captivity and make us dress the vines and plow the earth and teach us that after all nature is best. God's scheme is so big, his resources so many.

Humanity is always so much of a child, its digressions and sins are always more pitiful than terrible, and it always, when its small boy pranks are done, somehow comes back to its mother, whose forgiveness seems to be without end. Nature is pretty rough on the individual at times, but to the type she is wonderfully kind, and her mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. When she has one nation that is wholly abandoned and given over to its emotions, and another that analyzes more than it feels, she puts them together and lets them fight it out and they strike an equilibrium somewhere. She is a Spartan mother, but she has unruly sons to handle. We are growing too analytical ourselves, and we need young men like Rudyard Kipling and Anthony Hope, not because of the greatness of their talent, but because of the sincerity of their motive, because the atmosphere of their work is one in which men may love and work and fight and die like men. Because in their own small way they are carrying out the task of their great master and chief who died down in the blue Pacific last winter when the winds of December were covering us with snow. We owe him much, that great master of pure romance, even his death blessed us, for it drew the world's attention to his work and the greatness of it, to his faith and the sublimity of it, showed us how vast was the future for work like his. Living he enriched us by his life; dying, by his death. Romance is the highest form of fiction, and it will never desert us. If Stevenson did not accomplish its revival, some other man will. It will come back to us in all its radiance and eternal freshness in some one of the dawning seasons of Time. Ibsens and Zolas are great, but they are temporary. Children, the sea, the sun, God himself are all romanticists. Clouds cover the sun sometimes, and there is darkness upon the face of the deep, and God hides his face from us. But they come again, and with them Romance, as fair and beautiful and still as young as when it came with the troubadours to the springlit fields outside Verona where the Dukes

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held their Court of Love. As the old French song says, "The swallows that winter scatters. Will come again in the spring."

Speaking of Stevenson, if you want to read some noble and manly literature, just glance over those letters of his in the November McClure's. There you will find the modesty, the sad self-depreciation which belongs to the truly great, whose minds have so much more power to conceive than their hands ever have strength to execute, whose work is so far below the level of their dreams. In one of them he remarks, "I do not think it is possible to have fewer illusions than I. I sometimes wish I had more. They are amusing. But I can not take myself seriously as an artist; the limitations are too obvious." No, its the people like Sarah Grand and Beatrice Harraden, who take themselves seriously. Men like Stevenson have other standards than themselves whereby they measure the world, and they judge themselves impersonally, along with the rest of imperfect humanity, from a perspective above and beyond. A great craftsman's taste is always so much more perfect than his work. In another letter he says: "I wonder exceedingly if I have done anything at all good; and who can tell me? and why should I wish to know? In so little a while, I, and the English language, and the bones of my descendants, will have ceased to be a memory? And yet—and yet—one would like to leave an image for a few years upon men's minds—for fun." He wondered if he had done anything at all good. Well, as Henry James says, "Our doubt is our passion, and our pas-

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