

The Passing Show.

WILLA CATHER.

"I have trod the upward
and the downward slope;
And I have endured
and done in days before;
I have longed for all
and bid farewell to hopes;
And I have lived and loved
and shut the door."
—Robert Louis Stevenson.

Alphonse Daudet's funeral was one of the dramatic events of the season in Paris. A demonstration which could have occurred only in the capitol of the world of letters. With honors such as other nations pay only to kings, they bore him through the streets of Paris, that same Paris to which he came from the South some forty years ago, a boy of eighteen with a bundle of manuscript and forty sous in his pocket. Ah, what labors Herculean! what battles and what triumphs lay between that entrance and that exit!

That he died in his prime, before his glorious powers had failed him, before the cold of age had chilled the hot boy's heart of him, is only another proof that Fortune loved him with a more enduring constancy than is her wont. Not for him was the pitiable weakening so often attendant upon the age of genius, the senile vagaries and follies, the ossification of imagination, the blind groping for a dead inspiration. When Alphonse Daudet said adieu to life and art, the warm kiss of youth was yet upon his lips. God send us all good ending!

And he had lived: No man of his time more deeply and more richly. He was the North and the South, the Provençal and the Parisian, the Bohemian and the man of family. He went through the noisy bazaar, among the lying merchantmen and bought only what was precious.

The story of his first experiences in Paris, Daudet himself wrote ten years ago; how he went there in a third-class railway carriage, penned in with a crowd of drunken sailors, and how, on arriving with a capital of forty sous, he enters the profession of letters. He lived in an attic—the most commonplace thing he ever did—on the fifth floor of the Hotel du Senat in the Rue de Tournon with a horde of hot-blooded young Southerners like himself, among whom was Gambetta. All were desperately poor; all confidently expected to become famous, and all were citizens of that "Bohemia of the roaring Forties," not then extinct in Paris, which Meuser described as "an intermediate stage which leads either to the morgue or the Academy." It was from this corner of the Latin quarter that, when he had neither fire nor breakfast and all Paris was wrapped in fog, Daudet used to steal out to watch the great dome of the Odeon emerge slowly from the mist, that Odeon where the audience was one day to rise when he entered. It was from there, too, that, attired in his first dress coat, he went to his first reception at the home of Augustine Brohan, the actress. He told in his "Thirty Years in Paris" what agonies of bashfulness he suffered on that occasion and how, in spite of his gnawing hunger, he could not eat, and in trying to get a drink of water upset a decanter and tray of glasses and sent them crashing to the floor. After this embarrassing mishap he

made his escape as soon as possible and trudged homeward through the snowy streets with no overcoat and with the icy wind whistling through the tails of that sacred dress coat, stopping on his way at the market to drink a bowl of cabbage soup among the fish-mongers and venders of vegetables. Years afterward Sarcey tried to recall the incident to Mme. Brohan and she said it must be a mistake, she only knew Daudet through his books. The long-haired Provençal youth who broke her wine glasses she had forgotten. A Parisian wit of the last decade once remarked: "Whenever I meet a particularly stupid boy from the South I have a horror for him, for I am haunted by the fear that he will become great."

When Daudet's first play, "La Dernier Idole," was brought out in Paris he had been ordered out of France for his health. On the very night of its first production he was in the further end of Algeria living with a couple of Arabs in a tent under a clump of dwarf palms, and lay looking through the flap at the burning orient stars, longing for Paris. The telegram announcing its magnificent success was brought to him across the desert by a red-coated horseman riding at full gallop. Immediately he was seized with the fever for Paris, that city which all the geniuses of France have equally loathed and loved, from which they are always fleeing but never escaping. Daudet was annually taken with a revulsion for the place; always wandering back to the South; living now in complete isolation in a lighthouse with only the sea birds for company, now in a windmill in Provençal, now in the desert. But the end of every journey was Paris. Once, when he was working in an old farm house down in the Rhone country, a reporter from Paris came down to write up a country fair and dropped in to breakfast with Daudet. Daudet had never seen him before, but as they talked of the happenings on the boulevards that unnamable fever for the city came over him, and though he was just in the middle of "Le Petit Chose," and knew that he could never finish it away from the Rhone valley, by nightfall he was on his way back to Paris.

This delightful vagabondage, half the restlessness of a boy, half the caprice of a poet, was never quieted until his marriage. What a superb piece of irony that the man who wrote "Les Femmes d'Artistes" and so bitterly condemned marriage for artists, should have married the woman he loved and should have loved her through a life-time. As he wrote of it years afterward: "I married! How ever did that happen? To what magic art did such a wild gypsy as I fall a victim? What spell was cast over me? What charm was strong enough to bind fast my once ever-changing caprice."

By the English-speaking world Daudet is known chiefly as a novelist; in France his rank as a dramatist is almost as high. The only one of his dramas which has been produced in America is "L'Arlesien," which Minnie Maddern Fiske played under the rather inadequate title of "The Liar." Beside his work as a playwright Daudet did a great deal for the French stage in criticisms. He was

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the first critic in Paris to demand a scientific mise-en-scene, and he wrote the first history of dramatic criticism in France. It was he who first designated Napoleon I. as the benefactor of the French stage and the father of modern criticism.

To place Daudet in the front rank of French novelists, with Balzac and de Maupassant and Flaubert, is to do him an injustice; it is applying a measure too large for him. Between their works and his there is that same indefinable shade of difference that you find between the pictures of Millet and those of Jules Breton. He had neither their technical mastery nor their elemental power. They were the giants of letters, those three, and this was only a gay troubadour from the South, with a lute as sweet as a nightingale's note and a song always dipping from laughter to tears. He left no novel which, in days to come, will carry the conviction and power of "Notre Coeur" or "Madame Bovary" or "Cousin Pons." He has place among the men who, from the recesses of a single brain, fashioned a world, and who created a humanity of their own. He was a temperamental artist. He was not profound either in his observations of life or his interpretation of it. He saw the beauty which glitters upon the surface and reproduced it with a delicacy, a pleasure, a vividness only possible to a temperament so alert, so capricious, so exquisitely sensitive. Sentiment continually tempted him and he was often dramatic before he was true. He had a thirsty, never-satisfied eagerness for life and art. He could perfectly reproduce all experiences; he described things utterly inexpressible; he mastered the lan-

guage of sensations. That very ever-present personal quality which disqualifies him for a place among the greatest creators of fiction, is his most potent and persistent charm. He conquered by the element which was his weakness; he made his deficiencies gloriously triumphant. "O, wind and fire of the South, ye are irresistible!"

"Kings in Exile" will always be Daudet's most popular work in the Anglo-Saxon world. Henry James says that it is "a book that could have been produced only in one of these later years of grace. Such a book is intensely modern, and the author is in every way an essentially modern genius."

But once and only once did Daudet

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