

The Passing Show.

CATHER.

Of all novels in the world stage novels are usually the most trashy and flatly unnatural and impossible, at least American and English novels, Henry James' magnificent "Tragic Muse" of course excepted. In France, where the theatre holds a more assured and legitimate place among the arts than here, the local color of the footlights has been rather overworked in fiction, but with us it has been left to the penny dreadfuls. Frederick Stokes & Co. have recently published a book, "The Barn Stormers," by Mr. Harcourt Williamson, which is an exception to this rule. "The Barn Stormers," as the title indicates, deals with the lower walks of the theatrical profession. Miss Monica Narine, the central figure of the story, is a young English amateur, gently bred and educated in a French convent, who comes to America in search of the fame and fortune which usually await even the most inferior foreign players upon our soil, but Miss Narine is not sufficiently versed in the popular methods of advertising to command the attention of metropolitan managers, and is forced to accept an engagement as "leading juvenile" in a company of barn storming pirates who are playing week stands in the rural villages of Ohio. On her way to join the company at Bagara, O., she blunders into the private car of a Colorado magnate who finds her much too good for her prospects and eventually turns up and rescues her from the clutches of an unscrupulous and designing manager. But this little romance is not particularly new and is really of only secondary importance. The chief interest of the book is centered in the adventures and personelle of Mr. Scott Ambler's barn-storming company.

It is no easy thing to write a good stage novel and faithfully preserve the atmosphere which eventually forms the lives of the people who live in it. That profession has customs, technicalities, a parlance of its own of which the general public is as ignorant as of the technicalities of music or painting. Again, the "pirates," the camp-followers of the profession have mannerisms and expressions of their own, differing from those of legitimate players as a patois does from the legitimate speech.

It would be well if all authors before writing of a particular class or profession would inform themselves as thoroughly as Mrs. Harcourt Williamson has done. I confess I have never before heard of the lady, but so well has she her subject matter in hand, that I would almost wager she has been at sometime more or less directly connected with the profession on the exigencies of which she is so thoroughly posted and with the people whose innocent vanities and foibles she knows so well. One whose knowledge of the theatre is confined to its aspects in large cities could scarcely realize how faithfully the experiences of these poor barn stormers are presented; the horrors of local trains and rural theatres, the small boys of the village hooting at the "show women," and the kindly condescension of the chamber maid at the hotel who says, "I always do feel sorry for you poor actresses; folks is so down on you, aint they? Ma'd be as mad as fire if she knew uncle let me associate with actresses." There is the provincial atti-

tude for you!

The personelle of Mr. Scott Ambler's company is sketched with cleverness and truth. There is Mrs. Scott, the leading lady, a person of mountainous physique and an uncertain temperament, who flies into a passion at rehearsals and shouts that her husband is trying to "queer her business." There is the poor little red-haired pianist who weeps incessantly because she is cast for "Weenty Paul" in the Octoroon and has to appear in trousers, thereby exposing the lankness of her extremities to her sweetheart who plays in the company. There is the sweetheart himself, patient, stupid and loyal, one of those fellows peculiarly unfitted for that profession yet who often drift into it; who carries the pianist's bag and makes her fires and taps on her door when they have to make early trains, and lends her his salary to send home. There is Miss Fannie Free, billed as "The Little Human Flower," and sometimes lovingly called "Fancy Free." She is the wife of the stage manager, pretty after a plebeian fashion, and genuinely witty after a plebeian fashion, and she wears her per-oxide hair short and curled. Have we not all encountered that soubrette hair in railway trains and the corridors of hotels? She plays soubrette parts except in the "Octoroon," in which she is permitted to play Zoe because of the great success she had achieved in that role "when she was a star." Then there is "Jim Crawford," the heavy man of the company, who has the good looks of the bar tender variety and who loves the English girl just because she is unlike anything he has ever known and because he cannot in the least understand her, and because she is as instinctively fine as he is coarse. She loathes him instinctively at first, but finally gets used to him and even partially accepts his attentions. As Mrs. Williamson very pertinently remarks, the worst feature among several others is the kind of things one "gets used to."

Mrs. Williamson makes a strong point of the isolation of this little company of human beings with human longings and human needs; the constant pressure on all sides from without which drives the lonely man to seek the sound of a human voice and the warmth of a human hand; drives the fine to the base, and, alas, the base to the fine!

On the whole, Miss Fanny Free's remarks very well describe Mr. Ambler's company; "We're a queer lot, but we're not as bad as we look."

Dickens, in "Nicholas Nickleby," admirably depicted the absurdities of a troupe of provincial players; Mr. Crummels and Mrs. Crummels, who recited "The Blood Drinker" and the poor infant phenomenon. But he gave them only absurdities, made them mere blustering caricatures of men and women. Surely even the poor barn stormer may say with the unhappy Richard:

"I live by bread like you, feel want, Taste grief, need friends."

Mrs. Williamson, whatever her faults of style, and they are almost past numbering, has made her barn stormers living men and women, actual and distinct characters, stamped with verity and unmistakably the-

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As a story of the stage "The Barn Stormers" is clever, keen, and realistic. As a piece of writing it is slovenly faulty and amateurish. The discrimination prompted by good taste, seems entirely lacking in Mrs. Williamson. Her story is certainly not enhanced by such similes as the following: "The morocco sides of her purse came together like a pair of sucked-in cheeks." "The sparkle had gone from her eyes and her hopes, as from last night's champagne." "The eggs at breakfast were rather suggestive of the Renaissance or some remote period of his'tory." It is almost incredible that an author who can make a narrative go with such sprightliness, could permit herself, at the close of her story to say that the heroine did not reply because "her lips were otherwise engaged." Perhaps Mrs. Williamson has lived too long among the people she describes and has worn off the fine edge of her taste.

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BY TELEPHONE.

Hello! Mars?

Oh! Twinkling stars,
How queer this seems.
Our wildest dreams

For years, have been to pierce those beams.

Yes, this is earth!
Perhaps not worth
A glance, although
Not long ago

We thought the world was ours, you k.o.w.

Mars, tell us first,
Were you accursed?
Did you begin
With wicked kin

Who handed down original sin?

Do not deceive!
"Your mother Eve
Was far to cute
To eat that fruit?"

"Our planet all things doth pollute."

Oh! I could weep.
"Earth, the black sheep!
The only one
Around the sun

Whose parents were by sin undone."

Do not ring yet?
I'm quite upset.
Hello! Hello!
Oh! What a blow.

We're snubbed by Mars! Hello! Hello!
—Mary Day Harris.

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