

of religious controversy and was ready to be passionately stirred by the eloquence of such preachers as Stanley and Pusey and Liddon (who 'came down from the pulpit white and shaken, dripping with perspiration'). No doubt many of the things that strike us as flaws in Mrs. Humphry Ward's assumptions of Papacy, her narrow political views and her limitless faith in the decency and respectability of reaction, are survivals of a

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time when intellectuals felt it their duty to live cautiously in a world that seemed changing too rapidly and too radically. We would be willing to pay her a certain honor for her real achievements if it were not for the literary pretensions which she has never shown more brazenly than in this volume. But there is nothing to be said when a sound and serviceable piece of mahogany furniture insists that it is really Chippendale.

EDMOND ROSTAND

BY ALFRED POIZAT

ROSTAND is dead. He heard the call of Destiny at Cambo, and hurried to Paris to be ready for that hour which God had prepared for him in Paris, still decked with the flags of victory. And thus the death of the poet takes on a symbolic coloring. *Chantecler* departs with the illusion of having caused the sun of Victory and the Great Revenge to rise, that sun of which he was so truly the prophetic clarion.

His was the opportunity, his the genius to sound in the ears of the world, in days of national prostration and doubt, the clear song of the Gallic race. Not the song of France, for there is to be found in that song a something beyond the voice of *Cyrano*. There is more to France than a 'white plume,' there is a soul that dwells sometimes under a plume, sometimes under no plume whatever. There exists a sound, noble, and harmonious, French genius which is capable of silence and patience and disdains shouting from the roof

top. It is that genius which one finds under the pensive brows of Foch and Pétain, and in the work of Descartes, Pascal, Molière, and La Fontaine.

And there is a Gallic genius, even as there is a Spanish genius, and an Italian genius — a thing brilliant, delicate, enthusiastic, impulsive, charming, ostentatious, impatient of all restraint, and always ready to toss everything to the winds and play the cavalier. This genius comes to its full fruition in national literatures. It gives huge pleasure to the people of the nation whose individuality it exalts, and after having made a certain stir in the world, retires within its own frontiers. For it ever fails to bring the world those great themes for meditation, the experience, the wisdom, and the thought of which the world has need. The prodigious success of Rostand with *Cyrano de Bergerac* was the explosion of a literary nationalism of this kind; it symbolized, in the world

of poetry, one of those many crises brought to pass by a patriotism which did not accept the Great Defeat.

France was then sullenly ill at ease concerning the politics and the literature which were being presented to her. She felt herself exploited, invaded by mysterious bands of dwarfs who were undermining her foundations, and chilled by a fog of bizarre ideas, blown from lands to the north, ideas which she vaguely held to be poisonous. Naturalism oppressed her. She saw nothing good in the little circles of symbolists and 'décadents' which were attracting the young intelligentsia. She was angry at not being able to understand this poetry unsuited to the profane. How was it that if poets did not have evil intentions, they took such care to hide their ideas in obscurity? The importance of the great work, and the revival of study going on in the schools could not be understood by the commonality. There was, nevertheless, something very noble in the reaction of the symbolists against the fevered search of worldly success and the mania of advertising. If it is true that real poetry cannot exist without the participation of the nation, it is well to tell the general public that its preferences and consecrations remain superficial and do not offer the necessary guaranties of greatness. The symbolists refused to recognize the authority of universal suffrage, and disdainfully proclaimed that poetry was a realm of right divine.

Whatever one may think of it now, the triumph of *Cyrano* was the perplexed and exasperated reaction of nationalism in literature. A thousand threatened interests took part in this reaction. It was the revenge of all the poets whose renown had dimmed, of those whom the arrival of the symbolists had stopped in mid-career. Rostand was, at the bottom, a Coppée who

had succeeded, a kind of whirlwind Mendés. He gave life and prestige to their formulas of art. And the aid was the more precious since it came from a very young man, thus proving that youth, when it had talent, had a talent similar to that of its elders. Parnassus, or perhaps the Romantic Parnassus, which had been thought dead, was coming to its own at last with extraordinary force. And the critical school, then in the hands of the Parnassians and their friends, beat their drums in a somewhat gross and provoking manner.

Our sentiment, that is, the sentiment of most all of us in the young schools, was one of sadness. I say sadness and not jealousy. Few of us were then thinking of the theatre, but all of us dreamed of seeing a pure and noble drama marked by a high reserve. *Cyrano* appeared to us a backward step. The very acclamations of the delirious mob seemed to us a certain indication of the truth of our view. Neither Racine nor Shakespeare had ever produced such effects. *Cyrano* tossed us back into the heyday of Romanticism; it freshened the claptrap of the Romantics; it plunged us back for twenty years into the musketeer style, into literary gilt and tinsel.

It was evidently some sort of a masterpiece. The dramatic power of the play, its *verve*, its genius even could not be denied. But it was, judged by its matter, general form, and style, a masterpiece of inferior quality, of a certain coarseness even.

Nevertheless, we had been following Rostand with sympathy. His *Princesse Loïtaine*, his *Samaritaine* represented a genuine effort towards the beauty of the theatre, an effort of extraordinary power. Of course there was some froth in the abundant torrent of his poetry, and now and then his ideas became confused. But it was all very lovely and surprising.

But after the presentation of *Cyrano*, we understood that Rostand was lost forever to great poetry.

Triomphe oblige. He knew it himself. He was to be in the future the man who made great sums, he was no longer free to do what he would with his life or even his house. He knew that they were watching him for the first sign of failure. At all costs, he must make a material success; all that he was asked to do was to make money. He sought a popular subject sure of its effect. There was then in France a strong Napoleonic movement, sustained and developed by the publications of Frédéric Masson. Rostand chose *L'Aiglon*, a bad subject to treat in verse, as are indeed all subjects of modern history, even though Victor Hugo set the key for it. But the necessities of a rapid and abrupt dialogue forced the author to make use of a tongue which was neither really prose nor really verse, but a something hard, rocky, ill fitted, constrained, and fantastic. Then, after a long wait and a long regathering of his forces, during which he was seeking a subject able to uphold his prodigious reputation, he hit upon *Chantecler*. He was condemned to seek an effect of surprise as well as one of force. He wished to give an impression of all-encompassing life, and to do it, drowned himself in detail. Wishing to have too many things in his play, he crowded it so that it cracked. But it was a gold mine which brought him in more than a million francs.

The reaction from Rostand dates from this hour. His *Ode to the Tsarina* had already caused laughter. The faults of Rostand had begun to appear. Even in the provinces, whosoever imagined himself a critic of literature, thought it quite the thing to speak of Rostand as the Georges Ohnet of poetry.

His death, however, will restore him

his prestige. It is to the author of *Cyrano*, more than anything else, that Paris of the Victory renders the last homage. In Rostand was incarnate the popular soul of an epoch. And that epoch is descending to the grave with him; but the man shall not be entirely hidden away in the earth.

In reality Rostand's memory will be that of one of the greatest dramatic poets of the nineteenth century. His work includes but six pieces, of which one should be eliminated, *L'Aiglon*, for though it may continue to hold the stage it does not properly belong to literature.

His career began in 1894, with his comedy, *Les Romanesques*, which has since formed a part of the repertoire of the *Comédie Française*. In spite of this circumstance, I do not believe that there is ground for considering this piece other than as a work of youth. It is a well-bred comedy, lively, agreeable, and well constructed, doubtless, but it might easily have been signed by some other name. It is second rate de Musset put into rhyme by a brilliant disciple of de Banville. Evidently there can be found, under this double disguise, the most brilliant characteristics and faults which were later to distinguish the author; there may be noted also that sense of the theatre in which he surpassed his models. But this is not Rostand's own drama; it is the drama of a school already on the down grade.

He opens his wings widely for the first time with his *Princesse Lointaine*, played by Sarah Bernhardt and her company at the Renaissance. The poet was then but 27 years old, having been born at Marseilles in 1868.

The theme is as lovely as any a poet could dream of. It deals with the legend of a troubadour prince, the youth Joffroy Rudel, who hearing cer-

tain pilgrims from the Holy Land tell of Melisande, Princess of Tripoli, fell in love with her, and sought her out only to die at her feet. Heinrich Heine had already made of it a touching poem.

The first act is an astounding marvel. The poetry lives less in the verses, though there are some very lovely ones, than in the coil of dreams which sustains the dialogue and in the supreme art with which the poet has created his atmosphere and his characters, his ship and his action. No Frenchman has ever equaled Rostand in his management of crowds on the stage. The more folk there are to move about, the more one feels that Rostand is thoroughly at home. It is wonderful, indeed, to see all this mimic world of minor characters, each one recognizable by some trait of character—to see them going about their ways, not at all interfering with each other, but bringing to the drama an extraordinary force, life, and *élan*. On last analysis, it is by means of this naïve crowd, so picturesquely variegated and alive, that Rostand manages the action of his dramas. From act to act an enthusiasm ripens into a kind of poetic madness. In this respect, the first act of *La Princesse Loïtaine* is a finished model, a masterpiece of art and science. This rare gift alone would rank Rostand among the greatest of dramatic authors.

Aboard the vessel which bears the dying poet towards his dream, the sailors themselves, mere pirates, whose conscience is sullied with many a murder, become amorous of the poet's fancy, and dying of hunger and worn out by fatigue, continue to row on in the hope of seeing the beauty. The chaplain and the physician of Jofroy's house have followed the little Prince; there is also to be found aboard the *trouwere*, Bertrand d'Almanon, whom

the poetry of adventure and friendship has led to join the expedition. And Bertrand revives the courage of his companions by songs celebrating the beauty of Melisande.

Eh bien, bons mariniers, je veux
Vous le raconter encore une:
Du soleil rit dans ses cheveux
Dans ses yeux rêve de la lune;

Un je ne sais quoi de secret
Rend sa grâce unique et bien sienne
Grâce de Sainte qui serait
En même temps, Magicienne!

Telle, en son bizarre joli
De Française un peu Moabite,
Mélissinde de Tripoli
Dans un grand palais clair habite!

Telle nous la verrons bientôt,
Si n'ont menti les témoignages
Des pèlerins, dont le manteau
Est bruisant de coquillages!

This is a pretty song. It was then a something quite new, and directly born of the notions which pleased the young symbolists. One might have thought the lines written by a provincial Henri de Régnier. Let us turn to the suave couplets in which the chorus of pilgrims address Melisande.

Un Pèlerin.

La Palme redira nos durs chemins — le lys
Ta beauté qui nous fut la meilleure oasis!

Deuxième Pèlerin

La Palme nous dira le sévère trophée
Le lys, le souriant souvenir d'une fée!

Troisième Pèlerin

Adieu Princesse, lys toi-même de beauté!

Quatrième Pèlerin

Lys toi-même de grace et de gracilité.

All this had the right ring to it, and clearly indicated that the young author possessed a balanced and delicate sense of the conventions of poetry. Ah! why did he not stop there, and retire for a little toil and meditation, why did he not make more use of the de Régniers and the Maeterlincks? His foot was

firmly placed on the road of a splendid art. How willingly would I not have given two dozen *Aiglons* and *Cyranos* for two or three *Princesse Lointaines* brought to perfection.

It is true that it was too difficult to continue along that road. Even in the middle of the second act, the poet, arrived at a crossroads, took the wrong one and lost his way. For there were then, in addition to the influence of symbolism, other literary influences which could not help seeming new and legitimate to a dramatic poet — above all, the influence of the dramatic school of which Paul Hervieu was the leader. Rostand, finding himself face to face with the kind of situation Hervieu loved to treat, thought himself obliged to treat it in the manner of Hervieu or de Porto-Riche. He allowed himself to fall from the heights of his dream into the emotional tangles of that worldly comedy which has since become so wearisome.

Here is the scene. The ship has arrived off Tripoli, but Jofroy Rudel is too ill to be carried ashore; Bertrand d'Almanon offers to seek the Princess and swears to bring her back.

The Princess is guarded by a giant, the terrible Knight of the Green Crest, who allows no one to enter. But Bertrand threatens, all by himself, to take the castle by assault. He cuts down the sentinels, he cuts down the Knight of the Green Crest, and, wounded, finds himself at length in the presence of the Princess, to whom, following his friend's desire, he recites the ballad which the poor lover has composed for her. The Princess already knows it by heart, for Pilgrims have told her often that a young Prince of the West is dying for love of her. To this point, the action is a thing of admirable poetry! But once arrived at this stage, an unfortunate change begins which continues for some time. Surely it was

clear enough that the Princess thought Jofroy himself before her, or at any rate was stirred by his young, brave, and handsome messenger. To preserve the high level of the play, this growing emotion should have been cut short in a rapid scene, and the reality worked out in terms of poetry and the sublime. The public and the reader should see only flames of fire. Melisande, so like a gorgeous figure of mediæval glass, should never have been torn from her window. But instead of making her the heroine of poetry whom the public awaited, Rostand made of her a heroine of Hervieu, thinking perhaps to transform her into an Omphale or a Delilah, and in so doing he required too much of his character. As a result there follows a mediocre and painful act and a half, during which the charm of the play is torn apart. The author resumes the grand manner in the last act, but the reader tries in vain to put away the *malaise* born of the preceding scenes.

The play, in this condition, had but a half success. It remained to the very end a matter of regret for Rostand, who, well aware of how he had passed just to the side of a masterpiece, never abandoned his idea of rewriting it and having it played again.

It was his misfortune not to have by his side a counselor of sure and elevated taste, who might have turned him away from his error. For even the great make mistakes.

Faults of taste appear also in *La Samaritaine*, but these are only faults of detail. It was hardly good form to make the gospels so worldly, not to mention Rostand's disastrous idea of turning the Lord's Prayer into verse. These criticisms once dealt with and put aside, I venture to say that *La Samaritaine* will remain the wonder of connoisseurs. It takes genius to distill three acts out of a short and simple

passage from the gospel, and what acts they are, inspired by emotion and enthusiasm! I hold that *La Samaritaine* is one of the most extraordinary works of the French drama, and that if its form were purer and less corrupted by the spirit of decline, the play would have been one of our classics.

As for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, that is also, in its way, a staggering kind of masterpiece, yet, I repeat, whatever be its dramatic genius, it is not a masterpiece of the first water, but of the second. It is, if one will have it, the epic of the Cadets of Gascony, but there is better in France than the Cadets of Gascony; there is a higher kind of heroism; there are souls more thoughtful, and finer and deeper figures. Since a type of national heroism was to be exalted, it would have been wiser to have chosen this better type. The war has just shown us this very thing. There is a bit of fustian in those heroes of Rostand's.

I regret this drama for yet another reason. It lost us Rostand. It led him away forever from the noble highway upon which he had entered, following which he might have, with the aid of a little self-discipline, completely recreated our drama and led it to the summit which it occupied in the seventeenth century.

The proof of what I have advanced lies in the fact that after *Cyrano* began the decline of Rostand. He did very little else, if we except *L'Aiglon* of which I have said what good I can.

I know that he worked on a *Faust*. What could he hope to draw from such a subject, after Goethe? o

He worked at least ten years on *Chantecler*, whose idea, he has told us, he took from Goethe's *Roman du Renard*. I recognize there the obsession of Goethe and of *Faust*. Rostand dreamed of making his *Chantecler* the poem of the immensity of Nature, as Goethe had made of *Faust* the un-

finished poem of the moral and physical world. *Chantecler* was to be his *Faust*, his *Divine Comedy* into which everything entered, a satire of his own time as well as of eternity. He put too much into it. His mastery was submerged. Noah's Ark became a menagerie, the play collapsed amid intolerable boredom. Nevertheless, *Chantecler* remains a great idea born out of season, in which may be found some superb things.

After all we must render due justice to Rostand. To the end he cherished the ideal of beauty and the cult of the masterpiece. The small number of works he left behind proves this.

At thirty years of age he had already achieved the major part of his work. He was thus:

Le poète mort jeune à qui l'homme survit,

or perhaps it would be better to say not that the poet died, but that he entangled himself in a formula of art which was not his. He either did not dare or could not descend from his triumphal path to begin anew the difficult ascent which he had begun in his youth and from which success had separated him. But perhaps *Cyrano* and *L'Aiglon* had so changed him that he could no longer see poetry and the drama as he had seen them through a young man's eyes.

Rostand dies young, yet he had survived himself twenty years. He knew this, and would not make the fact seem an illusion. And this fact was without doubt the great sorrow and secret drama of his existence, apparently so brilliant and happy.

Poor, noble Rostand; *Poor Yorick!* Whatever one may think of it, whatever it may be, Rostand's work remains great. If posterity retains only two or three of his pieces, has it retained more of authors far more famous?

THE ELECTRIC LIGHTS

BY MAXIM GORKI

A TRAVELER just back from Siberia has told me the following story:

I was seated on the platform of a station some hundred versts from Omsk, when I saw a bulky peasant with a pipe in his mouth coming towards me. He sat down by my side.

'Are you going far?' I asked.

'I am going to Omsk,' he answered gravely, 'to get some electric lights. They have installed electricity in our village, you know, the thing with wires.'

'Have you had it some time?'

'No, not for very long.'

I begged him then to tell me how the village folk came to introduce the new invention. And here, almost word for word, is the peasant's story:

'Since it was known that since September a new power, the power of the Soviets, had reigned at Omsk and that they were about to try Socialism, we of the village came together and decided to find out what was going on, and what these "Soviets," were that had been given to the people. We chose old Léon, a crafty old fellow, as our messenger, and said to him, "Take these thirty rubles, go to Omsk, and try to find out something about the Soviets and these Bolsheviks; be certain, moreover, to ask what "Socialism" is.'

'At the end of two weeks Léon came back, and with him was a soldier. We met together, stood Léon on a table and said to him, "Speak out." And Léon began to tell his story. "Well," says he, "all's fine up there—as for the rest, the soldier can tell you about it better

than I can." So we said to the soldier, "Just what art thou?" "I," he answered, "why I'm a Bolshevik, a communist, and I'll stay with you if you'll make me your commissioner." After having well thought the matter over, we said to him, "Stay." "I thank you deeply, comrades," said he. "Now let me look about, and get my bearings."

'At the end of a week we had organized a Soviet. And now old Léon, who certainly had well learned all that had been taught him, says, "Now that we have turned the corner and can call ourselves Bolsheviks, we must destroy and we must build." But what were we to destroy? We have nothing to destroy. So the soldier said, "Since we are communists, we ought to make requisitions. Where is your bourgeoisie?"

'We stand silent. You know we don't have any such thing among us.

'Again the soldier asks, "Where is your bourgeoisie?"

"Your pardon; excuse us," we answer him, "we have n't got any."

"Eh! You don't know yourselves. I'll find bourgeoisie for you. Let me talk to the people."

'So we gathered together sixty people for him, and the whole party went off to a place about forty versts from here. A day later they came back bringing with them a dozen nabobs and ten thousand rubles of the Tsar's paper. The soldier said, "There's your bourgeoisie!" We said to them, "Are you bourgeoisie?" "Yes, we are." "Well, put yourselves at ease; we are not going to ask you for ten thousand rubles apiece." "How much are you going to