

# THE FATE OF OLD FAVORITES.

BY WALTER CREEDMOOR.

IN EUROPE GREAT ARTISTS WHO HAVE PASSED THEIR PRIME STILL FIND A LOYAL PUBLIC, BUT  
IN AMERICA POPULAR TASTE HAS NO APPRECIATION FOR THEM.

IT is pleasant to hear, as I do now and then, that some particular form of art has taken root in the virgin soil of this western hemisphere and is flourishing like the traditional green bay tree. It is pleasant to hear this even when we do not believe it, and if we hear it often enough we can sometimes delude ourselves into the belief that it is true.

That we have made what writers on social economics usually term "giant strides" from Egyptian darkness toward the great white light of artistic appreciation is a fact generally admitted; but there is one respect in which we have gone backward instead of forward during the past quarter of a century; and that is our loyalty to our artists. I can think of no greater bitterness than the old age that lies before the man or woman whose life has been devoted to the entertainment, or artistic development, of the American people. The expression "old favorite," which is a term of endearment in other countries, is here simply a means of denoting contempt. As a people, we have no interest save in that which is new, and the ease with which a fresh comer in any field of art can displace those whose silvered heads are crowned with the laurels that they have fairly won in years gone by is something to cast a chill over the soul of one who hopes to reap, in later life, the just rewards of a lifetime of artistic toil.

Sometimes I can scarcely restrain myself when I hear art and artists discussed in that tone of sixpenny cynicism that downy cheeked men of society, undergraduates, and other sage ones of the earth, so frequently assume when they wish to make an impression. I have noticed that some of these lads know very little of literature, and are utterly unable to pass their examinations in Greek or mathematics, but they do know the private histories of the singers and players of the country, and are peculiarly happy in their sneering references to those who have been for many years before the public. When one of these knowing ones desires to gain a reputation for cynicism and a discriminating taste in art, he simply adds a few years to the age of every one whose name comes up for discussion, and in a short time he finds himself looked up to by his fellows as an authority on such matters. This is the sort of chat that ensues when half a dozen of these young Pelhams get together in a corner of the Simian Club:

*First Pelham:* I passed Kitty Breeze in the street yesterday, and I tell you she's getting old enough to vote. A friend of mine, Charlie Caxton, knows her very well, and he says she's fifty if she's a day. Know Charlie? I tell you he's a great boy.

*Second Pelham:* I suppose you didn't see that young fellow who plays the English lord with her, hanging round in the vicinity, did you? I guess he wasn't far off, he, he, he!

*First Pelham:* Haw, haw, haw!

*Third Pelham:* What?

*First and Second Pelhams, together:* Why, everybody's known that for a year past.

*Fourth Pelham:* I came near being introduced to Fanny Hinton last week, and I think I'll send a note round to the stage door and mention my friend's name and ask her out to supper tonight.

*First Pelham:* Better not keep her out too late, Joe; she's likely to get rheumatism this damp weather.

*Fourth Pelham:* Oh, come, she's not so old.

*First Pelham:* Oh, no, only about forty.

*Second Pelham:* Say, let's go somewhere tonight. S'pose we take in Boster and Kial's about ten o'clock and hear Patty Pepsin sing "Toddling Down the Strand, Boys." I tell you she's the greatest thing ever came over the pike.

*Third Pelham:* She's quite young, isn't she?

*Second Pelham:* Not more than twenty, and a bird! She does a dance that's the greatest thing in the town. The sophomore class has taken ten rows of seats for Saturday night. They'll whoop it up, I can tell you.

*First Pelham (glancing at watch):* Come on then, it's near ten now. (*Exeunt connoisseurs.*)

There is not one of these interesting young gentlemen who would not be surprised and grieved to learn, as he will if he can recognize himself in this article, that his conversation, so far from showing him to be a keen witted satirist and an accomplished critic of contemporary art, simply reveals him in the light of an untutored donkey, who ought not to be permitted to talk about dramatic art or artists. The farmer who comes to New York to buy a gold brick is not generally regarded as an authority on such urban institutions as the stage, but he is a veritable Philip Gilbert Hamerton in comparison with the amateur critics who think that acting is merely a

matter of bright eyes, a fresh complexion, and vulgar effrontery.

The best of dramatic art is that which has slowly ripened to maturity. It is given to but few women under forty years of age even to understand Shakspeare's heroines, and yet scarcely a season passes without its "second Adelaide Neilson" in the person of some immature, over advertised gawk who thinks that she is entitled by a six months' apprenticeship in a dramatic academy to learn the lines of *Juliet* or *Parthenia*, and repeat them, parrot-like, to whomsoever can be lured into the playhouse to listen to her. In my capacity of dramatic critic I have observed that the début of one of these "Neilsons" is usually preceded by a great deal of amateur press work, conducted by all sorts of persons, who call upon the critics and tell them that it is their duty to "lend a helping hand to the dear little girl, who leads a sweet home life and is absolutely devoted to her art."

It seems perfectly just to these well meaning emissaries of the new *Juliet* that the press of the country should unite in coupling her name with that of a woman who won her exalted place in a most difficult profession by hard work, backed by absolute genius; and that every dramatic writer should "lend a helping hand" in the beneficent work of foisting an unlearned, uncouth amateur upon a public that has already suffered too much.

I have never yet been asked to assist in the launching of one of these débutantes that some reference has not been made to the career of Mary Anderson, which is generally regarded by people who know nothing about the stage as one of the most noble and praiseworthy in the whole history of the American dramatic profession. For my own part, I can never think of Miss Anderson save as a beautiful calamity, who laid siege to the

public by her good looks, stormed it with her enthusiasm, and in a remarkably short space of time compelled it to lay down its dollars and capitulate. The result of her career was an incalculable injury to dramatic art, as well as to the thousands of young girls who sought to follow in her footsteps, and of whom many, for a time at least, succeeded in absorbing a certain share of the public attention.

We are still living in a "youth and beauty" age, and while we are applauding new and untried players, men and women who are ripe in years as well as knowledge of their art are finding themselves elbowed into obscurity, and all the time the "gigantic strides" which are taking us nearer and nearer the ideal artistic perfection continue to excite the interest of writers on social economics.

I once heard Sims Reeves sing before a company that consisted largely of middle aged and elderly Britons, and it did my heart good to see the way in which they rose to their feet and cheered as the last quavering notes of "Come into the Garden, Maud," died away. I could not help feeling at the time how fortunate it was for him that he had made his fame among a people who know how to cherish tender memories; for the grizzled old men who made the banquet hall ring with their cheers that night were applauding him for what he had sung forty years ago, when life was young and love was strong within them. I watched their faces as they listened, and it seemed to me that every note of the worn old voice conjured up in every breast some memory, sweet or sad or gay, of days long gone by, and I have never honored Englishmen more than I did those who had the grace to cheer a favorite old artist for the songs he had sung long ago.

#### A LITANY.

NOR from the dangers that beset our path,  
From storm or sudden death or pain or wrath,  
We pray deliverance;  
But from the envious eye, the narrowed mind,  
Of those that are the vultures of mankind,  
Thy aid advance.

Not at the strong man's righteous rage or hate,  
But at the ambushed malice laid in wait,  
Thy strength arise;  
At those who ever seek to spot the fair,  
White garment of a neighbor's character  
With mud of lies.

Not from the good intentions of the fool,  
The honest enemy, or unjust rule,  
Or flame or sword;  
But from the venomous word, the slanderous guess,  
From envy and uncharitableness,  
Deliver us, good Lord!

*Theodosia Pickering Garrison.*