

Plays Which Make Entertaining Reading

MADAME SAND—A biographical comedy—By Philip Moeller. (Knopf.) \$1.25.

WHETHER Mr. Moeller thinks that Mrs. Fiske failed to interpret George Sand—his *George Sand*—or not, he is wise in offering the text to the reading public. The text is attractively clothed in an odd binding from the house of Knopf.

Philip Moeller is nothing if not clever. *Helena's Husband* is exactly the sort of thing an extremely clever young dramatist should write. Burlesque is a legitimate field of art, but that does not mean that every person or every theme is adapted to the true ends of burlesque. In the case of George Sand and her associates there is room for grave doubt whether the characters of that extraordinary woman and her lovers are artistically capable of yielding the proper material for broad satire.

It is not a question of whether Musset and Heine, Chopin and George Sand, ought or not to be burlesqued; the point is, Mr. Philip Moeller has attempted to do it, and we are shocked, because we know that Musset was not merely a bundle of incarnate temperament, that Heine was not a walking volume of proverbs and witticisms and that the exasperating George herself was not the absurdly capricious being Mrs. Fiske portrayed.

Too Far or Not Far Enough.

Of course Mr. Moeller is not altogether to blame for what Mrs. Fiske and her company did with his text; it is likely that he had very little to say, but the script undoubtedly afforded Mrs. Fiske every opportunity for the free and exaggerated interpretation she saw fit to give it.

To be specific, the quarrel with Mr. Moeller is this: He has either gone too far in burlesquing a really interesting and human series of episodes, or he has not gone far enough. In other words, his *George Sand* is a trifle too grotesque to allow us to sympathize with her as a woman and a human being; Heine is little more than a lay figure; Musset does not live. Now, to make the play a pure burlesque, Mr. Moeller could easily have stretched a point and given us an uproarious farce, another play in the manner of *Helena's Husband*. *Mme. Sand* falls between the two extremes, and we find ourselves sympathizing for an instant, and then laughing at ourselves for our foolishness; and ending by disagreeing with the play.

To add that the play is formless is hardly necessary; perhaps Mr. Moeller intended that it should be, in which case a hint to him might not be superfluous; the next long play he writes would prove vastly more effective if he took one story and developed it consistently, instead of three.

Good Lines and High Comedy.

These strictures passed, the play may be enjoyed. It is vivacious, picturesque, full of good situations and replete with bright lines. The scene in the first act where George persuades Alfred de Musset's mother to allow the youth to go with her to Italy is in the vein of highest comedy. It is such scenes as this that prove Mr. Moeller's ability to build up situations and write dialogue. He has now only to prove that he can construct a three act play as an organic whole, and he will not find it difficult to assume a place in the front rank of American writers of comedy.

The book is prefaced by a foreword from Mrs. Fiske (a brilliant if occasionally ungrammatical literary portrait of George Sand) and a short introduction by Arthur Hopkins.

ANATOL AND OTHER PLAYS—By Arthur Schnitzler. (Bonis & Live-right.) 60 cents.

The *Modern Library* of more or less contemporary standard works is a welcome edition to readers with slender purses. The editors of this series are at once astute business men and benefactors; credit is due them for bringing such books as *The Red Lily*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Way of All Flesh* and *The Confessions of a Young Man* within reasonable range of the poor man who dislikes trudging to the library and who might care to grace his shelves with some copies of authors who have written since Thackeray and Dickens. So far the *Modern Library* comprises some thirty odd volumes; these are presumably only the beginning of a representative collection of what is best among the world's books of the past thirty or forty years. It is significant that five volumes are collections of plays. Among

the latest of these is Arthur Schnitzler's *Anatol and Other Plays*. This convenient little book contains the seven *Anatol* episodes, the complete four part cycle of *Lying Hours*, and the single one act play *The Green Cockatoo*. These are all elsewhere accessible, but there is no other edition which brings them together.

The Eternal Viennese.

Here is the essence of Schnitzler: Cleverness, cynicism, melancholy brooding, fatalism, quiet charm. *Anatol* shows us the eternal search for novelty and sensation and the eternal disappointment. Women come and go. One enjoys the adventure, doubtless, but how banal, how useless! Nowhere else is the Austrian so "French"; it seems as though Lavedan had been transplanted into the Austrian capital. *Lying Hours* (for the first time the four plays are brought together as they were written and intended to be read) strikes a more serious note, except in the bright and most amusing skit, *Literature*. *The Green Cockatoo*, used some years ago by Mrs. Fiske as a curtain raiser, is a deftly constructed little masterpiece. Schnitzler has caught and held for a moment the spirit of the French revolution.

An Attractive Book.

The volume will appeal to the general—even the casual—reader, to the student of dramatic literature as well, and also to the play producer.

Ashley Dukes, the young English critic, writes a brief and pointed introduction. He very justly differentiates between the Austrian and the German stage. His remarks on Schnitzler as a dramatist and an analyst of character are suggestive.

The plays are translated by Grace Isabel Colbron. Her translation of *Anatol* naturally challenges comparison with Granville Barker's free version. It lacks the ease and grace of the English adaptation, but this may be because of Miss Colbron's fidelity to the original. On the whole her work is sincere and the critic need not complain if Schnitzler's delicate style fails to emerge from the ordeal of translation with all the limpid charm of the original.

Plays of Provence, Japan and Spain.

The Light of Provence (Putnam), by "J. S. of Dale," is another blank verse play, or rather "A Dramatic Poem." It tells a story of old Provence, "entirely historical," we are assured, and derived from learned authorities, whose names are included in a brief foreword. Historical or not, the play is not memorable as drama, or particularly significant as poetry. The story is a pretty one, and capable of dramatic treatment, but the author is constantly forcing his characters to make speeches, appropriate and inappropriate, which prevent the logical unravelling of the plot.

Takeda Izumo's *The Pine Tree* (Duffield) is better known in the version used by the Washington Square Players, called *Bushido*. The printed text is a very free adaptation of a Japanese classic play, but in general it is not so good as the one used at the Comedy Theatre. The chief trouble with the printed play is its occasional stiffness. The story is simple and effective and, according to M. C. Marcus, who contributes an "introductory causerie," a typical product of Japanese dramatic art. There is a mine of information in this causerie, which comprises "Some Glimpses of Old Japanese Literature," "The Elements of Japanese Drama," "Early Tragedy and Comedy," "Development of the Drama," "The Classical Period" and finally an essay on "Izumo and *The Pine Tree*." This introductory matter is the most valuable part of the book, and will appeal to casual readers if not to students.

A Spanish Drama.

A few recent volumes of Spanish plays in translation testify to the growing interest in the contemporary Spanish stage. *La Pacadora* (Putnam), translated by Wallace Gilpatrick from a Spanish translation of the original Catalan of Angel Guimera, appeared at about the same time as John Garrett Underhill's translation from the original, which is included in *Masterpieces of Modern Spanish Drama* (Duffield). It seems a pity that the same play should appear in two versions, especially when so many other Spanish plays wait to be made known to the English reading public. However, *La Pacadora*

is a splendid example of the great Catalan's art, and is a welcome book.

Not long ago Mary Macmillan wrote a book of *Short Plays*; it is now followed by *More Short Plays* (Stewart & Kidd). These are seven in number. *The Dress Rehearsal of Hamlet* is characteristically playful. There are others in the same collection cleverer, perhaps, and more amusing, but for ingenuity and structure this little skit is the best. Mary Macmillan's stage directions are delightful to read if hard to act, and her plays will undoubtedly find producers among amateurs as well as those who would rather read books than see plays.

LOUVAIN—A tragedy in three acts—By Charles V. H. Roberts. (The Torch Press, New York.) \$1.25.

Were it not for the evident sincerity of the author and the inherent possibilities of the theme *Louvain* would scarcely warrant reviewing. However, those who seek further reasons for just anger against the German hordes that invaded Belgium and prefer to work up an emotional rather than a reasoned feeling about atrocities will turn to this verse play.

Thrills and Laughs

THE LOST NAVAL PAPERS—By Bennett Copplestone. (E. P. Dutton & Co.) \$1.50.

This is a group of longish short stories devoted to the doings of one Dawson, pride of the naval branch of the British secret service. Dawson in his youth was a red marine among various other things and he never forgot it, although he grew to be a star sleuth of the secret service. Dawson is as clever as sleuths are in books and enjoyable. He is very human and amusingly vain over his exploits.

The first and longest story, which is practically two stories in one, moves a bit clumsily, although the young spy's letter is a pathetic bit of tragedy written with sympathy and understanding. The second story, *Madame Gilbert*, is the cream of the book. It is as funny as it is interesting.

Dawson's secretiveness angers the brilliant but excitable French secret service agent, Froissart, detailed to work with him. Froissart resolves to steal a march on Dawson and do a bit of sleuthing on his lone concerning a suspected leak of information through the Flying Corps. It is to be chiefly for the "desolation of Dawson," but it resulted in the "desolation" of both Dawson and Froissart.

A Suspicious Romance.

For Dawson's employee, a fascinating widow of international antecedents, and Froissart's employee, a handsome English ex-captain of aviators, suspected each other mutually as the sought for spy and had a charming time for several weeks at the expense of the English Government until they learned the truth. The culminating scene of this secret service romance, which took place in the bedroom of a Brighton hotel, is comedy of the best sort and much more proper than it sounds here.

To See Is to Believe is a good navy story and there is a tang of salt about the whole book. All the stories are of here and now in the thick of the great war. We meet a crowd of fearless fighters and good seamen, far-minded as seamen always are, respecting, even liking a gallant brave and skilful foe and playing the game fairly and squarely with no hatred or rancor. They "leave that to middle aged civilians who write for newspapers," as one of them says in the book.

There is some gentle chaffing at the elastic provisions of the defence of the realm act. And it's amusing for a layman to learn that the navy look down on even their own land army as "rotten civilians." The last story takes some violent liberties with known facts and personalities of recent history. But all in all it is a good book and a book many men will like.

For His Faith.

THE TWO DREAMS—By Justin Masse. Englished by Frederick Arthur. (The Devin Adair Company.) \$1.35.

Every now and then a French book finds its way to our shores which is so different from the usual strong, well written and oftentimes tearlessly cynical novels that seem to typify French literature to me that it is worthy of mention for this reason alone. These books show frequently a deep touch of sentiment, not to

The plot of the piece is crude; there is no natural, inevitable development; incidents simply spring up and disappear.

There is no visible reason for casting the dialogue into verse form. Of poetry there is none. Take the following short speech, put into the mouth of the German Minister to Belgium:

Oberhaus:

At least to me it seems so. Pardon—
'Mid these sweetmeats, beauties and perfumes.
(To himself.)

More like tavern counsels staged by imbeciles.

Dream, laugh, go lightly—but what's coming?
(Aloud.)

Ach! Mademoiselle, your touch is royal.
(To himself again.)

Peace makes one grin and horny about the knees.

These walls shall be blazoned with the shapes of power;

Yon vases wait but for the torch of fire.

Mr. Roberts has not even the excuse of working in the free verse medium; until one reads the speeches they appear to be in blank verse iambic pentameter. But perhaps he intended to cast aspersions on his German character? However, he has tarred his sympathetic personages with the same brush!

say sentimentality, for which a review of the most famous French literature does not prepare us at all.

This little book is a case in point. It is not really a novel; it just tells a story as a newspaper or magazine article might do if well written, and it is a most pathetic little story against the background of the separation of church and state in France. This event meant little to us here, but as a step forward to progress it meant much to France. Also, as always, there were many to whom it meant a crushing blow to the faith that had been theirs. It seemed to them to be the end of all things, and sometimes it really meant financial ruin, as in this story.

The book tells the story of a country lad who goes to Paris to earn the money to develop his striking talent for the violin. His first dream is to become a great artist and make home and fortune for his widowed mother, a country grocer. But he wanders into the church's arms and gives up this dream for the dream of a life of sacrifice devoted to preaching the Gospel. His mother's home town is a modern town, subscribing wholeheartedly to the freedom of belief and the separation of church and state. But, as often happens, the progressive minded people of that town were not kind and resented Abel's decision by boycotting the little widow and bringing her to financial ruin. Abel helps his mother and both find consolation in their faith. However one may feel toward the subject, this simple little tale shows us what the thing meant to a good many people. It is well to know that.

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