



TALK OF THE THEATRE.

Everything has been swallowed up by the Oratorio concerts. At least I have not heard of anything else going on just now.

It seems almost too good to be true that we are actually to have a visit from the Gra Opera company, which opens here on the 30th I believe.

How I break the 10th commandment when I think of the lucky Bostonians and how they are revelling in music just now with Cavalleria Rusticana, Mascanigoli's great success.

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The Telegraph's editor persists that Camille died of heart disease and not consumption, and calls those who laughed at his ridiculous error "over-wise." Perhaps the following, from the Paris correspondent of the Boston Herald will not only interest him, but prove that Camille was suffering from a "mortal malady"—consumption, and that Miss Combs' "cough" was the result of perfect attention to detail and not "a cold."

"I have recently been reading the reports of the imperial censors, who, in September, 1851, forbade the play of Le Dame aux Camelias to be produced on the French stage. Six or seven years after that drastic interference with the liberty of the drama I saw an English adaptation of the work in St. Louis, played by Matilda Heron in Ben de Bar's theatre, and awhile later I saw her in the same piece when Henry Farrer was manager. It is always the best drawing play in Sarah Bernhard's repertoire, and after it comes Frou Frou, though personally I like her better in Adrienne Lecouvreur than in any other comedy. Mr. Abbey puts Le Dame aux Camelias up for a matinee whenever he wants to see tears and—a full house, for it draws both all over the country. The women of the United States, the goody-goodies and all the rest of them, like Camille, as they call it, a great deal, and yet it is one of the most immoral pieces that was ever put on the modern stage.

It was in the first place intended as a vaudeville, the principal role being reserved for Dejazet, but she backed down from such realism and declined to wear the silken robe of Marie Duplessis. Then Dumas made it a comedy, and after he had got permission to produce it, Mme. Doche, who was not only one of the most accomplished and pleasing actresses, but almost one of the prettiest women that ever adorned the Paris stage, scored in it one of her most brilliant successes. Dumas said to her at rehearsal: "Play it just as if you were in your own house," and yet she was a good, pure woman.

It was to have been originally played in September, 1851, but the censors forbade it, and it was their original report against the play I read three days ago. "This piece," said they, "is the mise en scene of last life without prudence or shame, of gallant women willing to sacrifice all, even their health, for the enervating influences of pleasure, luxury and vanity, and who finish by finding a lover for whom they do not hesitate to carry to excess their devotion and self-abnegation. Such is Marguerite, known as La Dame aux Camelias, because she likes and wears only that scentless flower. From a simple ironer of linen, she has come to have as gallant protector an old duke, and for lover a rich count, and their mutual liberalities, without counting presents from strangers, amount to £100,000 annually, which sum she foolishly spends in waste, believing that, as her life is being mortally burned out by a malady, it is better to make it short and sweet as she goes along.

"One evening, when most of her intimate acquaintances are present, a new admirer, by name Armand Duval, son of a receiver-general, is presented, and he is seized by a deep and ardent passion for her. His reserve, bashfulness and careful behavior at first excite the rallery both of the mistress of the house and of her lively guests, but soon, in the first steps of a scottish, Marguerite stops, half-stilled by a choking sensation in the throat, and blood reddens her handkerchief. It is nothing, however, and on her request to be left alone, the friends pass indifferently into another room and light their cigarettes. Armand, pale with fear and overcome by emotion, remains with her. With affectionate interest he points out where such a life as hers must lead, urges her to fly and be saved before it is too late, and promises to cure her and befriend her as a brother. Marguerite is so astonished that she responds to his kind avowal of devotion by requesting him to leave the house at once and save himself from her influence. He is too young and too sensible to live in such a world as hers; such a heart ought to be loved, but she thanks God she has never loved anybody. These last words exalt Armand more than ever, and Marguerite, by a sort of pity, tells him not to despair too much, and to come and see her again.

"This, however, is not enough for Armand. Then let him ask what he wants, let him make the programme. Well, what he wants is that one shall send everybody away so that he alone shall remain with her, and that, to this evening. No, that is impossible; but she gives him a flower from her bouquet which he will bring back to her when it is faded, say in 24 hours, and when it is midnight, but he must be very discreet and obedient; and intoxicated with hope and happiness, he withdraws. Marguerite starts to return to her society, but on opening the drawing room door she sees on the floor a piece of paper containing the words 'good night.' They have heard all, guessed all, and have taken their departure. 'Well, they shall not say that they were deceived,' she exclaims, and she orders her femme de chambre to recall M. Duval.

"After four consecutive days with Armand, during which he has come at midnight, not to leave again until an early hour in the morning, Marguerite asks to be free on the fifth night; but he, madly in love and as jealous as a tiger, tells her that she wants to receive some one else. No, but she is tired, 'et ce n'est pas les jeurs on plutot sous les nests fete.' 'Swear, then, that you are not expecting some one else,' he exclaims. 'I swear to you that I love you, and no one but you. Is this not enough for you?'"

"Armand retires with regret, and the count whom she also thinks she loves, replaces him. Marguerite has dreamed of spending two or three months with Armand, with him alone, in the country, and has already asked for £6,000 from the old

duke, who has promptly furnished it; but she wants £15,000 more, and, as the count is without ready money, she asks him for his note for £18,000. At this moment a letter written by Armand is brought in. He has seen the count enter, asks her to pardon him for not having £100,000 income, and announces his intention of leaving Paris immediately.

"This letter brings you good news, my dear Julien," she cries; "you get £18,000 by it. I was in love, and wanted you, my dear count, to pay the expenses of my living a while quietly with the other one. Yes, let us go to supper; I have need of a little airing."

"Armand, in his despair, rushes to see a friend of Marguerite's, living in the same house. He is anxious to see the perfidious object of his affection, but his friend, fearing a scene between Armand and the count, sends word to Marguerite, who is still at the door waiting for a fur pelisse to protect her from the cold, that she must speak to her immediately. So Marguerite goes upstairs again, and learning that Armand is there, sends to the count to say that she is indisposed, and thus gets him out of the neighborhood.

Armand throws himself at her feet, and she tells him that she is no longer free; she does not possess a single cent of fortune, and yet spends £100,000 annually, and that it is necessary to take people as they are and understand their position.

"I am a woman; I am handsome; I am a good girl, and you are an intelligent fellow. Take what there is that is good in me; leave what there is that is bad, and don't bother yourself about the rest. I dreamed of passing two months with you in the country, but to bring it about I had need of this fellow. That would have sufficed to calm and extinguish our passion—because in my world when a passion has lasted two months it has run its course—and we should have returned to Paris, should have shaken hands, and what was left of our love would have passed into good friendship. But that would have humiliated you, for your heart is that of a nobleman—let us speak no more of it. You have loved me these four days, send some sort of a trinket, and let matters drop entirely."

"But Armand, listening only to his passion, begs her, implores her to be his, and Marguerite at last give in, exclaiming: 'Let us reflect and reason no longer; we are young; let us follow the course of love.'"

"The young lovers spend two months at Bougival, enjoying an ever increasing happiness, but the old duke and the count have ceased their liberalities, and Marguerite, desirous of not troubling Armand, has to meet necessary expenses, been compelled to sell her horses, carriages, cashmere, and jewels, and her creditors, no longer having the duke and count to answer for her liabilities, threaten to seize and sell everything by auction. In the mean time, things have not fared well with Armand either. His father has cut off his allowance, and Marguerite is about to sacrifice her splendid furniture at a ridiculously low figure, and go into more humble apartments with the young man, when Duke pere appears on the scene. First of all he tries the effect of paternal authority over his son, but, that proving of no avail, he turns to Marguerite, and finishes by not only tearing out of her a promise to quit her lover, but to persuade him that she no longer loves him.

"The unhappy creature makes this double sacrifice, and to lift all incertitude from Armand's mind, accepts the offers of one of her rich adorers, and becomes his mistress. But this terrible trial has exhausted both strength and courage; the malady which has long threatened her makes rapid progress; she lingers for a while, and then, in the arms of Armand, who arrives almost at the last moment, as loving, as devoted as ever, she breathes her last."

"This analysis, the imperial censor went on to say, though incomplete in incidents and scandalous details, sufficed to indicate from a moral standpoint what there was that was shocking in La Dame aux Camelias. It was a picture in which the choice of persons and the crudity of colors exceeded the limits of the most advanced theatrical tolerance. That which added to the inconvenience of the subject, and to its mise en scene, was that it represented the life of a fast woman recently deceased, who had furnished a novelist and M. Jules Janin, a critic, the one with a book, the other with a biography, which had become popular because certain details and situations which could not be dealt with otherwise were mentioned clearly. With these considerations in view, and being of a unanimous opinion, the censors asked the minister to refuse to let the play be performed."

That was on Aug. 28, 1851. Four days later the censor made a second report, as follows: "M. Pouffe, on behalf of the manager of the Vaudeville theatre, and apropos of a play in five acts and six tableaux without couplets, which is intended for that theatre under the name of La Dame aux Camelias, has requested us to consider a new manuscript of this same work, wherein the author has, so it is claimed, struck out the passages which would most awaken public susceptibilities. We have thought it our duty to refuse it a new examination, but a second reading of the piece convinces us that it remains the same in the main and in its principal developments. It is always the same picture of the manners and intimate life of kept women. Marguerite continues to take from the hands of the old duke and from those of the count, money with which to live quietly in the country with Armand, and when induced to renounce the lover, she accepts the offer of another whose mistress she publicly becomes. In this state of affairs we unanimously adhere to the considerations and conclusions contained in our report of August 28 last."

Then M. Alexander Dumas worked with night and main to get the censor's opposition set aside, and the manager of the Vaudeville theatre helped him.

But they did not succeed, for, on Oct. 1, the censors submitted another report: "After a third and conscientious reading of La Dame aux Camelias we recognize that numerous abridgements have been made in the manuscript remitted to us by the minister, but we are convinced that this suppression of more or less shocking details does not remove the objections already indicated by us in our report of Sept. 1, last. Two tableaux, it is true, have been made into one; but this work, as well as our alterations, has in no way changed

the general spirit of the piece. It has been shortened, but not re-written. From beginning to end, the incidents, manners and characters of the personages remain the same. Consequently, regretting the duty imposed on us, we are impelled to persist in our preceding reports, and have the honour to ask the minister not to authorize the performance of this piece."

It was after this last report that the Duke de Morny got the emperor to interfere. La Dame aux Camelias was finally produced in Paris, and not long after that Matilda Heron purchased it for America.



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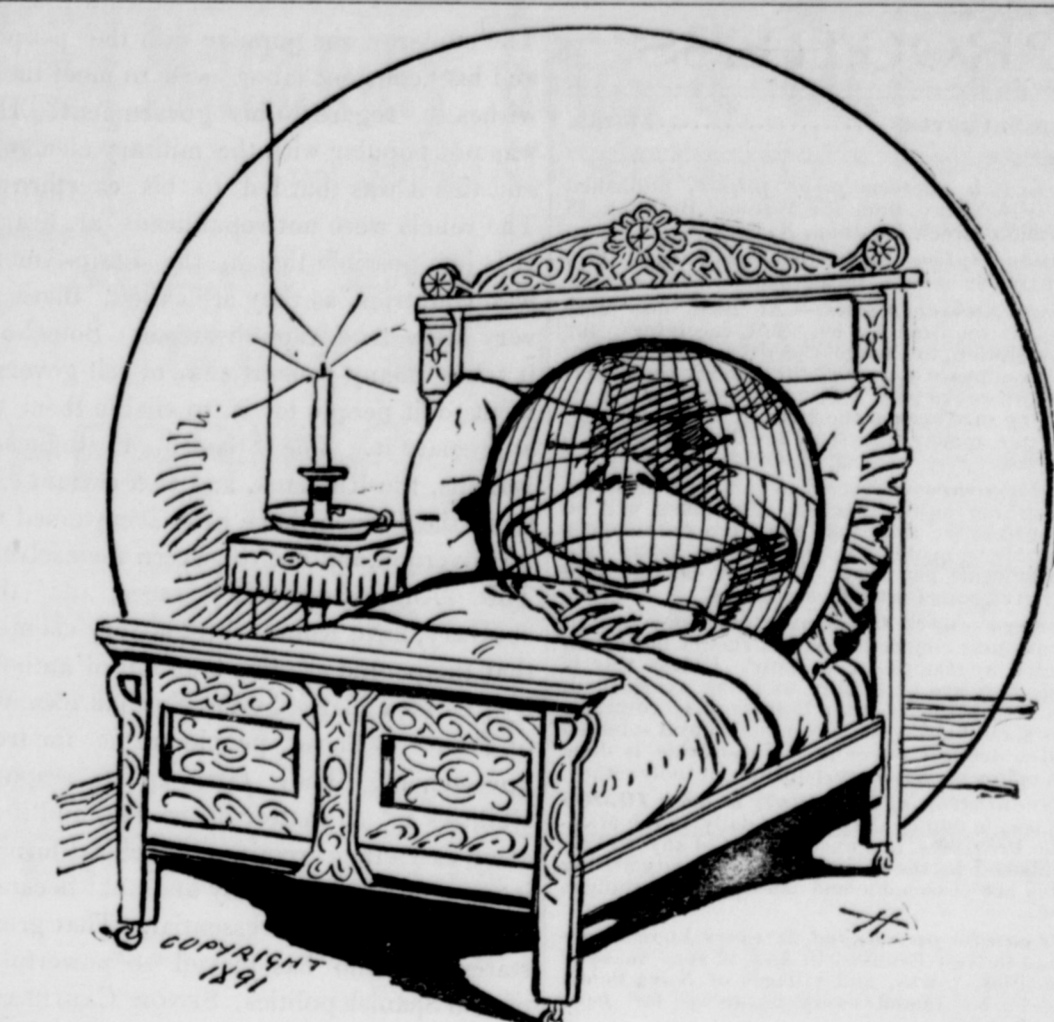
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