The Event of the Week.

"CYRANO DE BERGERAC."*

All London has been moved by this extraordinary and wonderful piece of work. One scarcely knows whether to review it as Literature or the Drama, whether as the work of Edmond Rostand, or the creation of the wonderful French actor, M. Coquelin. I want if possible to combine the two, to try and give the faintest possible idea of the beauty of the poem, and the interest of the play.

How entirely M. Coquelin has realised the author's own idea in his impersonation, is evident from the dignified yet fervent dedication :—"It was to the soul of Cyrano that I intended to dedicate this poem. But since it has passed into you, Coquelin, it is to you that I dedicate it. E. R."

Let me say one thing to all those who are able to read French. Do read "Cyrano" in the original if possible. I have not seen the English translation, and it may be excellent. But the aroma of the wit is so subtle and so French, that I feel sure that some of it must escape in the course of translation; and even those to whom it may be something of an effort to read a French work in the original, will be quite rewarded by the delight of the great beauty they will encounter.

The date of the play is 1640. Cyrano de Bergerac who is a historical personage, by the way, is a soldier, in Carbon de Castel-Jaloux' company of Gascons. He is also a poet of the highest order; his mind is of the most exalted character; but all his aspirations, all his courage, seems to be blighted by his peculiar and ridiculous form of ugliness—a nose of most startling dimensions. On the subject of this nose, the fiery Gascon is most sensitive, and kills anybody who ventures a pleasantry upon it. Cyrano is secretly, hopelessly, in love with his cousin Roxane, but so heavily do his own personal deficiencies weigh upon him, that he has no intention whatever of telling her so.

In the first Act we see the theatre of the day—the ladies in boxes above, the men crowded upon the parterre where there are no seats, but a refreshment buffet and card tables. The aristocracy are provided with seats upon the stage. Cyrano has a grudge against a certain actor (Montfleury), and has forbidden him to act again for a month, under pain of the terrible swordsman's displeasure. But Montfleury has been persuaded to disregard the threat, and there is a good deal of excitement among the crowd as to what may happen. However, Cyrano is nowhere to be seen and the curtain goes up; then immediately Cyrano's voice is heard, forbidding Montfleury to proceed, the crowd parts, and he is seen standing on a chair. He offers to fight all the audience, one by one, if they care to accept the invitation; but his fame is too great for that, and Montfleury finds discretion the better part of valour and decamps. Then a young Vicomte, despising Cyrano, sneers at him with the view of provoking a fight. Now occurs one of the great moments of the play. Cyrano undertakes to compose a Ballade as he fights, and to touch his adversary at the end of the *Envoi*. The acting of M. Coquelin here is almost a miracle of skill, and the refrain has already become quite a quotation in London :—

"A la fin de l'envoi, je touche!"

Roxane, the beloved of Cyrano, loves Christian de Neuvilette, a handsome young soldier in the regiment of cadets to which Cyrano belongs; and, when she has confessed this to her cousin, the noble Cyrano vows to befriend the man she loves. Christian has only just joined the regiment, and, being informed by the cadets, that the one thing he must avoid, is any remark upon the formidable Cyrano's nose, naturally takes the first opportunity of testing the truth of the story.

This is another of the fine scenes in the play. Cyrano, fresh from his promise to Roxane to befriend her lover, is interrupted time after time in the telling of a story, by Christian's loud remarks upon his nose. The horror, the expectancy of the other cadets, as to what form the vengeance of Cyrano will take, is unspeakably funny; likewise their stupefaction when Cyrano passes over the offence, and controls his rage by a mighty effort.

Roxane has bid Cyrano tell Christian to write to her; but it appears that poor Christian is only soldier, and could not write a love letter to save his life. This deficiency the devoted Cyrano agrees to supply. One night, under the balcony of Roxane, under the cover of the darkness, he takes the place of the tongue-tied lover, and speaks all his soul out to the woman he loves. I have read no love making, outside the covers of Shakespeare which can compare to this scene for delicacy, force and beauty. She entreats him to climb up to the balcony and talk. He says no, he can pour out his soul better so. In the night, covered by the darkness, he can for the first time reveal his love to her fully, and he does. The exquisite words move the girl to tears; at last she grants a kiss, and the beautiful Christian climbs the balcony to receive it.

Says Cyrano, below, in the darkness :—

"Baiser, festin d' amour, dont je suis le Lazare!
Il me vient dans cette ombre une miette de toi—
Mais oui, je sens un peu mon coeur qui te recoit,
Puisque sur cette lèvre où Roxane se leurre
Elle baise les mots que j' ai dit tout à l' heure!"

It would hardly be possible to surpass the subtle beauty of this thought.

But Christian and Cyrano are both snatched away, at the very moment of the marriage of Christian and Roxane, to take part in the siege of Arras. The fourth act shows the camp of the Gascons, and the starving army. Cyrano every morning has made his way through the enemy's lines with letters to Roxane from Christian, he having promised her that Christian shall write often. He, Cyrano, is the only one in the camp who can keep up hope, and he is appealed to whenever the starving besiegers seem likely to grow mutinous. To the camp presently comes a great coach, drawn by two horses, and, when the astonished soldiers open the door, Roxane emerges. She has come, at peril of her life, drawn irresistibly by the magic of those wonderful letters which she has every day received. The situation becomes a little difficult. It is necessary for Cyrano to inform Christian that he, Christian, has written to Roxane "more often than he supposes," in fact—it comes out shamefacedly —"every day, twice a day!"

Poor Christian has by this time discovered Cyrano's secret: and he bitterly cries, when Roxane has confessed that the letters brought her, that it is Cyrano she really loves, not Christian. In this bitterness of soul, he urges Cyrano to tell her the truth, and rushes away to throw himself in the line of Spanish fire. He

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