

AU THEATRE DU GRAND GUIGNAL<sup>1</sup>

LE SYSTEME DU DOCTEUR GOUDRON ET DU PRO-  
FESSEUR PLUME

*What this system really implies.*

POE !

Poe by the gift of the Lord !  
Poe in his tragedy,  
Black melodrama,  
Horrid, overwhelming,  
Nerve-shattering maniacal effort  
Dictated by morphia, Poe  
The American poet  
Translated by Baudelaire,  
Stephen Mallarmé  
And other people  
Of singular and perhaps  
Unique talent  
(Now joined by  
André de Lordes)  
Is a splendid success  
At the quaint little theatre  
Of Montmartre.  
Speed !—I mean Poe !

<sup>1</sup> A review on “ the Soothing System ” in its original French dress.

[Unhappily our contributor returned alive from watching the start of the Paris-Madrid race. He had provided himself with a copy of Mr Henley's "Imperishable Poem," and the metre, in which there is but one rule, viz. "anything scans," seems to have run away with him. Would the motor had done as the metre ! He will be printed as prose.—Ed.]

Filled with anticipations of the most blood-curdling order, we sought the breezy heights of Montmartre. The Sacré Cœur, looking more than ever like a compromise between an Indian mosque and a Buzsard cake, towered above us in the frosty twilight.

It is, however, invisible from the theatre itself, so that we were able to give our undivided attention to the system of Doctor Goudron and Professor Plume, and it is our interpretation alone which has any real value. It will be necessary first to call the attention of the reader to our own system, without some account of which he may find himself embarrassed, even bewildered.

Mr George Macdonald in his masterpiece of Haggardized Rabbinical tradition, "Lilith" (Off, Lilith !),<sup>1</sup> has broken the wind of the poor phrase to this effect :

"To grow and not to grow ; to grow larger and to grow smaller at one and the same time ; yea, even to grow by the simple process of not growing."

In these unpretending and innocent words lies hid (for the eye of the wise to discover) the germ of the most stupendous and far-reaching system of philosophy that has

<sup>1</sup> The Qabalah.

ever been presented to the astounded consciousness of mortal men. Quickly overrunning the civilized world, it has penetrated (auspice Teucro) into the very remotest steppes of Central Asia, the wildest savannahs of the American prairie, where dog and oyster burble in plethoric harmony among the verdant shoots of cactus and coyote, where the giant Appomattox rolls in sulky majesty to the red bays of the Pacific. The Society formed to exploit this unheard-of invention is, naturally, of a most secret nature : perhaps permitted to inscribe after their names the letters L.A.L. By the *New Method*, therefore, let us continue our interesting studies of the system of Doctor Goudron and Professor Plume. *Laure*, the first of three curtain (and hair) raisers, is a charming little drama. An ingénue comes by accident into possession of a letter compromising her mother. Discovered by her father, she saves her mother by accusing herself. The mother, secure once more, bullies and ill-treats the heroic child, so that the curtain falls on her despairing shriek of “ Misérable ! ” Here then is truth ! Not in a well, as lewd fellows have impotently pretended : but here, on the stage of the Grand Guignol. It was just what happens every time, when anyone is fool enough to sacrifice themselves. It was magnificent ; it was war !

Curtain-lifter No. 2 was a still wittier scene, yet the element of improbability<sup>1</sup> damped, not indeed the enthusiasm of the mob, but our own more sober and

<sup>1</sup> A débutante with her mother finds herself by inadvertence at a “ gros numéro.” But we betray our correspondent’s reticence. Enough.—ED.

judicious pleasure. You ask therefore in vain for detail. " La Mineure " (No. 3) was, on the other hand, even more life-like than No. I.

A witness retained by justice to identify a criminal discovers him by chance in the person of the President of the Court himself. She is hauled to the deepest dungeons of Saint Lazare, and everything thus ends happily. For one moment the nerves of the spectator are braced up to meet the sword of Damocles—and then, with a single blow, the Juge d'Instruction subtly and delicately strikes in, and we can breathe again.

The Docteur Goudron was now to appear, and it was a spectacle saddening to the serious philosopher to observe everybody pretending, often most elaborately, that they had read Poe's story on which the play is based. Alas ! that we should have been among them ! Yet so it was. Many years have elapsed since our feet trod civilized MacAdam ; many years since we spent hour after happy hour poring over our Poes. Surprising ? Ay, but true. Yet some dimmest recollection of Dr Tarr and Professor Feather does hurtle heavenward to us across the mist-kissed abyss of memory : so much, no more.

The actor who represented Doctor Goudren—his name is worthy to be graven on tablets of brass : it is consequently not to be printed here. His self-restraint, his command of expression, his elocution were alike wonderful.

Booth, Irving, could not have done it better : it could have barely been equalled even by Wilson Barrett in his prime.

Horror holds one from the outset : but when from words we go to deeds, the formulation of the Logos in the plastic, alas ! the element of music-hall supervenes— O Catulle Mendès. ! didst thou say, forced like Galileo to thy knees by an iniquitous tribunal ; *Personne ne croit à ces cadavres !* ? Yet we do so. The director's murder is done magnificently ; better than Macbeth, better than the Cenci ; better than the Mother's Tragedy.<sup>1</sup> No ! this praise is too fulsome, too indiscriminate ; but any way, better than the other two. He groans like laurelled Martial in Burn's poem ; yet his assassin does not tickle the ears of the groundlings with a coarse "*Crévé, nom de D— !*" but in supreme self-mastery, the iron control of a lunatic whose sanity is at stake, enters stern and silent,, his eyes glittering with fiendish joy — Bavière, thy poster is superb !—and develops with calm and scientific precision his system to the raving crowd of madmen and madwomen. Peer Gynt ! ay ! but Peer Gynt with a tang ! Peer Gynt vital, real, terrible.

What is the system ? That is fine ; but remember, my friends, that our own system comes first ! Charity begins as home and ends in the workhouse : so the new method must absorb our space—ay ! and infinite space !—to the exclusion of our unworthy imitators, Doctor Goudron and Professor Plume. To Montmartre then, reader ! to the Grand Guignol ! To the Madhouse,

<sup>1</sup> We have discovered too late that this is a despicable effort of our correspondent's jejune graphomania. Had we suspected that he was a poetaster as well as a degenerate and imbecile, we should not have printed this rubbish.—ED.

ha, ha, ha ! Shudder, shiver, shake, shriek, do everything that begins with sh, except hush—and that is Irish, after all.

Of one thing only do I warn you : from start to finish there is not a word or a gesture that could shock the most innocent maiden, or bring a gleam to the eye of the least hardened roué, or the most expert member of the Vigilance Society.

This, in a French theatre, is as rare as it is delightful ;<sup>1</sup> and though it is conditioned, like all phenomena, by space, time and causality, it is none the less refreshing.<sup>2</sup>

VLADIMIR SVAREFF, P.L.A.L.

<sup>1</sup> The MS. is almost illegible ; the word might be “ disappointing.”

<sup>2</sup> Ditto. ditto. ditto. “ refrigerating.”