

THE ACTOR AND HIS ART



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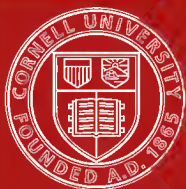
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THE ACTOR AND HIS ART

THE
ACTOR AND HIS ART
*SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF THE
PRESENT CONDITION OF
THE STAGE*

BY
STANLEY JONES

“The diseases of Society can, no more than corporal maladies, be prevented or cured, without being spoken about in plain language.”
—JOHN STUART MILL. (“*Principles of Political Economy*”)

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THE ACTOR AND HISTART

CHAPTER I.

THE ACTOR OF TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW.

It was once a principle of our social economy in choosing professions for our sons, that one should go into the army, another to the Bar, and "the fool of the family" into the Church. Since the abolition of purchase in the army and the application to candidates for admission to the Bar of the system of examinations, young gentlemen, unable to qualify by the exercise of their brains for the profession of arms or the law, have had to turn elsewhere for a livelihood. Far be it from me to suggest that this affords an explanation of the influx to the Church, which is under-paid as well as over-crowded. Young men of good family in these days go into "the City." If our big shop-keepers do not yet inter-

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marry with our old nobility, our young aristocrats, by their marriages with the daughters of rich American tradesmen, show that the most stubborn prejudices must presently vanish altogether. It is ridiculous to maintain that the manufacture of chairs and tables, or of jam and pickles, in London, is more inglorious, or less honourable and useful, than the sale of "dry goods" in New York or the slaughter of hogs in Chicago. Is there anything in the mere fact of "keeping a shop" to distinguish the lady of title who sells bonnets from the milliner on the other side of the street, or the tailor next door? An actress becomes a countess. A countess becomes an actress. Belle Bilton, Connie Gilchrist, May Yohe, dance and sing their way from the stage into the peerage. Countess Russell and the Earl of Rosslyn step from the peerage on to the stage. Honours are easy.

By the relaxation of the severities, the disruption of the old society, no class in this country has benefited more than that which follows the actor's calling. A radical change of manners coincides with the extraordinary

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change in public feeling towards the stage. From one extreme we have passed to the other. It is as if we meant to make up to the actor by over-loading him with favours for the contempt with which his calling has been looked upon in the past. It has remained for the present generation to discover the claims of acting to rank with the fine arts, and not only with the fine arts, but with the learned professions. Our glorification of the actor's calling has no parallel in any age. It has no parallel to-day in any other country in the world. It cannot be contended that the art of acting has reached any higher stage of development than it had reached in the time of David Garrick. "Fortuna non mutat genus," as Horace says of the moneyed slave. Only the condition of the actor, not of acting, has improved; and material prosperity is not progress. It is the ambition of every actor nowadays to become his own manager; but the control of the theatres by actors is to be deplored, as I shall show, for many reasons.

No argument against the management of theatres by actors could be more cogent

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than the plain statement that the Lyceum Theatre not long ago had to close its doors for a period on account of the illness of Sir Henry Irving. The first theatre in the country was found to possess so little attraction for the public, in the absence of one single member of the company, that it was considered more prudent to close it than to keep it open. There could be no more striking proof than this of Henry Irving's popularity as an actor. There could be no such incontestable proof of the impolicy of the actor-manager, who says, in effect, "Le théâtre, c'est moi!" The state of affairs is not much better at other theatres under the autocratic rule of an actor, where the manager's supremacy as an actor is not so unquestionable as it has been at the Lyceum. The younger members of the company at our leading theatre have not found any more opportunity than elsewhere for the development of their individual talent. To me, it has seemed as if the actors at the Lyceum of late years were all drilled into a studiously correct uniformity of style, so marked has been the guiding spirit of Sir Henry Irving

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in the performances. There may possibly have been some rare comedian, some actor with a remarkable sense of eccentric character, some incomparable *jeune premier* in Sir Henry Irving's company, but the style and form of plays produced at the Lyceum did not favour his chance of becoming famous. The discovery of new "stars" has no part in the astronomical system of the actor-manager. The performance of *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum without Henry Irving was dull; it would be fairer to say that it was dull with Irving as Iachimo, and duller without him. And of how many productions at the Lyceum of late years does the playgoer remember anything more than the performance of one character, or two?

True, Henry Irving cannot make actors, where the talent for acting does not exist, but he has certainly not been very successful as a manager in discovering new talent. Incompetence, however, never found a place in his theatre, and the members of the Lyceum company have had the advantage of learning their business under the eye of a master, more painstaking, more vigilant, more capable, than any other. The Lyceum Theatre, under

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Sir Henry Irving, has been our only school of acting, and good actors have come out of it — Cooper Cliffe, Norman Forbes, Martin Harvey, and others. But it may have been also the grave of some aspirant's ambition.

At our leading theatre one looked in vain for the coming actor and the coming actress. If not there, where are they? I look round at the theatres, and, like Sister Anne at the top of the tower, I see nobody coming. Wherever the actor is manager, there is no great encouragement for talent other than his own. The stage suffers for it in these days. It will have to pay heavily for it in the future. Our actors are not immortal. There is no profession like theirs for reminding us that "youth's a stuff will not endure." Who has not seen actors and actresses declining from popularity to obscurity? It would be too merciless to mention names, but I have in my mind half-a-dozen actors and actresses, the favourites of the town in their day, who cannot now find provincial audiences to do them reverence.

The charm of acting depends so much

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upon purely physical attractions that it is impossible for an actor or an actress, however talented, to whom some malicious fairy at birth has denied the gift of personal charm, to play the part of a sympathetic hero or heroine. Acting is distinguished from the arts by the fact that it is an exercise, not so much of the mental faculties, as of the physical. "Pretty, and a good figure" are such common recommendations for the career of an actress that the phrase has been consecrated to the use of the theatrical agents. In no other art is the person so considered. Ladies who write, for instance, are not exceptionally pretty. They have not invariably a good figure.

Age has no such horror for any artist as it has for the poor player, to whom no more agreeable flattery can be offered than to say that he, or she, retains in the middle age the graces of youth. The approach of age is a thing to be dreaded by an actress or an actor, for the men are in the like case. Even a portly figure will disqualify an actor (whatever his talents may be) for any parts but those of comic intention, in which the power

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of mirth increases with the circumference of the body. In one of the reputable illustrated papers the other day a portrait was given of a popular actor in his dressing-room, "making up" for the stage. It was well intended, no doubt: but the picture of a middle-aged gentleman, sitting before a glass, painting his face, may have moved many to a feeling for the mimic art other than of respect and admiration.

To the women of the stage, the advance of age is more terrible still, for there comes a time, and it comes to women sooner than it comes to men, when the raddled face, the worn eye, the set lips, are not beautified, but are even uglified, by paint. It fills me with pity when I think of the number of beautiful young women now filling small parts at our theatres, for I wonder what will all these mediocre actresses be twenty years hence? They cannot all hope to succeed to the *rôle* of the duenna. Their work does not afford them the necessary training for that. Their experience, for the most part, is restricted to a repetition of the same character in every play in which they appear. They cannot go

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on playing juvenile parts for ever. The present writer saw the great Déjazet represent a youthful character at the age of seventy. It is a recollection to shudder over. I have seen an actor, who was a favourite of the public but ten years ago, play before provincial audiences in the parts in which he most distinguished himself, and I have seen him move his audience to jeers, where he used to move them to tears. I have seen an actress whose acting is a treasured memory of the old playgoer, giggling and grinning before an audience puzzled to discover the traces of the charms by which their fathers were smitten. I have seen a comedian whose queer little person was once the idol of the town, shrivelling under the frigidity of a public tired of his tricks.

The best actors are those who are able to hold their power for long years over an audience. But how many are there on the stage to-day who seem to be able to do so either by the studied excellence of their acting, like John Hare, Wilson Barrett, James Fernandez, Lionel Brough, Charles Groves, J. H. Barnes, J. D. Beveridge ; or by personal

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charm as well as excellence of acting, like Henry Irving and Charles Wyndham? These are veterans who have mastered their business, who have lived the rough life of hard work and humble fortunes—the life that makes an actor—and in their youth played many more parts than are likely to fall to a young actor in these days. There is nothing for an actor to do that Irving and Wyndham have not done, from high tragedy to low comedy, and even burlesque. This is not the way in which the young gentlemen of to-day, more delicately nurtured than the actors of an earlier generation, prepare themselves for their calling. Their practice is limited. Possessing the faculty of imitation, they reproduce a type of character which comes within the narrow vision of their observation. A young actor establishes a reputation by his imitation of a young man of a certain class with whose affectations he is familiar. He plays the part not only during the run of a piece, but over and over again in other pieces. He plays the part till the public tires of it, and then the popular young actor, who can do

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nothing else, makes way for the next man. Reputations nowadays are soon made on the stage, but they are lost as quickly as they are won.

It is not only by great talents as an actor that Sir Henry Irving, whose performances of certain parts are certainly the most noted pieces of acting of our age, has succeeded in making the theatre not only popular, but fashionable. It would be idle to pretend that the Lyceum still holds its position undisputed, for that circle of society which will have no art but that of the stage now extends its favours equally to other theatres, and the list of the "fashionable people present," handed to the reporters on "first nights," is now pretty much the same at one theatre as at another. One sees the same faces at most first nights—faces of people with whose names the papers have made us too familiar. To Irving, more than to any other man, we are indebted for the magnificence and luxury of *mise-en-scène*, which is the great achievement of the theatre in our time. But luxury and magnificence in the decoration of the stage have now

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become so common, that one longs almost for simplicity by way of a change ; for the arts of the scene-painter and the costumier seem to have improved in an inverse ratio to the art of the actor. In *Madame Sans-Gêne* at the Lyceum we had a series of pictures of the fashions in dress and furniture of the First Empire, produced utterly regardless of expense, but there was all too little of the spirit of the period in the acting. It was disheartening to see the first theatre in the capital given over to an English version of an indifferent French play, in which Ellen Terry played the leading part of the washerwoman transformed into a duchess, in a style which suggested, by her manner and by the speeches which the translator has put into her mouth, at best a modern Englishwoman of the lower orders, placed in the midst of incongruous surroundings. Henry Irving, in the part of Napoleon in the same play, has been praised for his "make-up," and it has been stated, with an air of authority, that he prepared himself for the part by making a comparative study of various portraits of Napoleon—which suggests a study

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of the outside rather than of the inner man, which is the thing for an actor to realize. As a physical reproduction of an historical figure, Sir Henry Irving's Napoleon is no whit superior, in my opinion, to Murray Carson's Napoleon, or the mere plastic Napoleon of the late Harry Jackson. The "make-up" was more difficult for an actor of Irving's figure than for the others, and the actor's stature—which is given as 5 ft. 11 in.—has, I imagine, been exaggerated by a newspaper which reports that Sir Henry Irving was "delighted to explain" how he fitted himself to the clothes—"fac-similes of the garments of the Emperor." It was done, it appears, by a device which surely redounds not less to the credit of the maker of the breeches than to the glory of the actor who wears them; and for the life of me I cannot see that there is anything more wonderful in Irving's "make-up" as Napoleon than in Dan Leno's "make-up" as a lady of fashion in the Drury Lane pantomime. But Irving's performance was, however, not merely an affair between him and his tailor, and his Napoleon is a figure which impresses by the force of char-

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acter and the sardonic humour of the actor. This sardonic humour is characteristic of Irving—particularly in parts which do not fit him as well as Napoleon's breeches. He has given us a sardonic Richard III., a sardonic Macbeth, and a sardonic Iachimo. I prefer him in parts which are not—or in which he is not—sardonic; in Digby Grant, in Jingle, in Dubosc and Lesurques, in Mathias. In eccentric comedy and in melodrama Irving was unapproachable. In Shakespeare he has also had his memorable successes. The character of Benedick could not be better acted than it was acted by Irving at the meridian of his career. His Shylock was a beautiful piece of acting, and his impersonation of these two Shakesperian characters; to say nothing of others, shows how much higher is his talent, and how much wider his range, than that of any actor now living.

Although Mr. Willard prefers America—which seems, to the discredit of our public, to prefer him—we may still claim him as one of the most gifted actors England has produced in this generation. Mr. Willard

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himself is to blame (and to praise) for the neglect he has suffered in his own country, for he has disdained to practise the arts of advertisement by which other actors have obtained notoriety. Lewis Waller, whose Brutus and D'Artagnan have placed him above all his contemporaries, has not gone to America, but to Her Majesty's Theatre, and Forbes Robertson, who has not got a theatre of his own, appears only at uncertain intervals at the head of his own company, which is not much better than being permanently at the tail of somebody else's. In the meantime the field is left to George Alexander, one of the most agreeable and least inspired of our actors, and to Beerbohm Tree, one of the most ambitious, most versatile, most disappointing, and most promising. I am sometimes inclined to think that a first-rate actor of "character" parts was lost in the manager when Tree became master in his own house, and allowed his undertakings to gallop in double harness with his ambitions. As his own manager, he has escaped from that surveillance which he needs even more than most actors. His guttural

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accent has become more pronounced than ever ; his postures have become more ornate and his gestures more and more arborescent. Service under a stern manager would cure him of these vagaries. He retains to this day something of the touch of extravagance of the amateur which marked his early performances, when he played in comic opera at the Garrick Theatre, in Leman Street, White-chapel. He has a natural talent for acting, especially for what is called "eccentric" character, but a talent incommensurate with his aspirations as an actor of heroic or poetic parts.

Incontestably the most fascinating actor on the English stage is Charles Wyndham, once the first of our light comedians, now our best actor in high comedy. At an age when most actors must begin to look back for their successes, Wyndham started upon a fresh career. He established a new school of frivolous comedy—Criterion comedy, it was called—and when the new school became the old school, he cut with the past, retaining nothing but the elegance of his style, and an exasperating trick of dangling his leg. There is no

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actor who can animate the stage as he does; he can give animation even to a top hat, which seems an indispensable thing, somehow, when he wears it. The truth is, he is an actor who knows, as very few of them know, the value of detail—detail not carried to excess in the manner of this or that actor, who does everything with a flourish, but just sufficiently considered. In the nice conduct of a cane, or the manner of drawing off his gloves, Charles Wyndham's is finished acting, as compared with the deliberate acting of another, who puts a stick under his arm as if the destiny of the heroine depended upon it, and takes off his gloves as it might be to an accompaniment of slow music.

The worst of it is that Charles Wyndham, in his own theatre, must always have the *beau rôle*, and the regular playgoer, who goes to see Wyndham in a new part, now goes prepared to see him as a rival of the young man of the play for the affections of Mary Moore—the invariable gracious heroine. As our actor-managers have advanced in years, young love has been deprived of its proper place in the drama; and the *jeune premier* seems likely

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to be superseded by the middle-aged lover. *Autres temps, autres cœurs.* In *The Physician*, for instance, we have Wyndham in the same relative position to Mary Moore as we have seen him in *Rosemary* and in other plays. It is pretty much the same thing at St. James's as at the Criterion, only instead of the middle-aged lover, full of fire, we have a middle-aged lover, all sugar and spice, represented by Mr. George Alexander, an actor who has certainly not revealed any fresh talent since he became his own manager. In riding pillion, one must go behind. It is not to the actor, but to the manager, that the first place must be assigned in considering Mr. Alexander's services to the stage. Not that George Alexander, the manager of the St. James's Theatre, has done anything to discourage the aspirations of George Alexander, the actor. Only it is as a manager, shrewd and enterprising, that he has particularly distinguished himself above the rest by the welcome he has always given to native dramatists, especially to new writers who have received but scant encouragement elsewhere.

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Since the management of the theatres generally passed into the hands of actors, the number of actors and actresses who have risen into fame is so small that, if the playgoer will think of a standard comedy and will try to put the names of actors and actresses to the several parts, he will have a difficulty in finding, even in his mind, an efficient company. In practice, the difficulty is increased, for such talent as there is, is not available. The managers have it under lock and key. They have this actor, or that actress, under engagement, and the terms of their contracts do not allow the members of a company to appear elsewhere. A manager may say that he is entitled to the services for which he pays. He may say that the members of his company might be less valuable to him as a manager if they did not appear exclusively at his theatre. He may say that their power of doing good work for him is diminished if they are permitted to expend their energies elsewhere. He may say whatever he pleases ; and assuming that all his professed zeal for his art is nothing, and the thing with him is solely a matter of business, he is within his legal rights. It may

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even be granted that there is a certain cleverness in driving such a bargain. But the contention that the "artistic" value of any member of his company is injuriously affected by varying the monotony of playing one part is exactly the reverse of the truth. It is simply not the policy of the actor-manager to allow the members of his company to increase their experience, to improve their reputation, to become his own possible rivals. "With the permission of——," (name of manager duly advertised in the programme) some actors are let out for the day, as one might hire a horse. But once a manager gets an actor of particular talent under lock and key, his desire to encourage the art of acting does not extend beyond his own house ; and the ambitious young actor will not find much encouragement there. These actors have no tender feelings for their heirs. It is their desire to keep them out of their inheritance.

This is only natural ; the grievous thing is that they should be able to do so with impunity. When the theatres were managed by men of business who were not actors, their object was, first, to get as good a play as

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they could, and then to find the best possible actors for the parts. With the actor-manager it is different. The first thing is to find a play in which he shall have a good part, and the second to look to it that nobody else shall have so good a part as himself. A young actor was not long ago engaged to take part in a play by a dramatist who—in spite of his vehement professions of respect for his calling—has been as eager as any in accommodating himself to the requirements of the actor-manager. This young actor's part, as it was originally written, was too prominent a figure in the piece to please the manager, and the character was summarily dismissed from the action early in the play. Under the old order this would have been impossible. In the present condition of the stage there is nothing to prevent it. Under the old order, an actress of the rank of Mrs. Patrick Campbell would have had the managers at her feet; under the new order, London is not large enough to afford a permanent place for the greatest talent the stage has brought to light in our generation. To George Alexander, belongs the honour of bringing Miss Fay Davis

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into a position which nobody claimed for her before she appeared at the St. James's Theatre in *The Princess and the Butterfly*. Not for the first time has fortune, in an ironical mood, thus favoured George Alexander. It was under the same manager that Mrs. Patrick Campbell became famous. There have been few such surprises elsewhere, for all dramatists are not so little disposed to make sacrifices to the actor-manager as Mr. Pinero, to whom, not less than to Mr. Alexander, should be given the credit of having been twice the means of bringing an actress to the front. Again, it has been also Mr. Pinero's good fortune—with the assistance of Mr. John Hare, the very least assuming of all our managers, and an actor, always exact, who is the finest artist of them all, next to Sir Henry Irving—to establish the reputation of Miss Irene Vanbrugh, whose performance of Sophy Fullgarney in *The Gay Lord Quex* is the most remarkable bit of acting since Mrs. Patrick Campbell's higher flight as Paula Tanqueray.

The aim of the managers generally is not only to make their own position as actors

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unassailable, but to hold everybody else in check. Time is the only competitor they cannot resist. When the actor-managers begin to fall out of their places, we shall see how permanent is the injury they have done to the theatre. The stage used to be directed by managers who considered the general effect of a performance, but nowadays everything is too often regulated merely with regard to the vagaries of a single performer. At one of our leading theatres, the manager actually secures a certain distinction for himself by insisting that the company shall adopt a more or less boisterous style so as to afford an impressive contrast to the quiet, ophidian style in which he makes his entrance. "How undemonstrative!" says the audience; "how much easier is his acting than that of the others!"

The actor has suffered not less than the dramatist under the autocratic rule of the actor-manager, and the actor-manager himself has suffered from the absence of all restraint. When an actor-manager attempts to disguise himself it is rather by the skill with

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which he paints his face, or by the cunning with which he is dressed, than by the illusion of acting, that he makes his effects. David Garrick is said to have been able to produce the impression that he had added to his stature. He did this only by the loftiness of his deportment, not as it is done by the undersized actor, who is elevated, in a practical way, by a "lift" to his boots. The accessories of acting—costumes, scenery, music—are too much considered, and too little thought is given to acting.

There are actors whom the public do not expect to be other than themselves on the stage—George Alexander, Arthur Roberts, Charles Hawtrey, to take three notable examples. If ambition urged Mr. Alexander to play Othello, I believe I should recognize him at once by the ring of his voice, and the poise of his head, to say nothing of his legs. And the legs of an actor, I opine, may serve as well as his face or his voice, to give expression of character. Even a well-graced actor, lacking that repose which Henry Irving, Forbes Robertson, and Lewis Waller possess above all the rest, may give you the

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impression, when he appears, in trunk and hose, that his legs do not belong to the character he represents. Arthur Roberts is Arthur Roberts, and never anything else, and when he is not as amusing as usual there is nothing more to be said than that Arthur Roberts "is not quite himself." Again, Charles Hawtreys is successful within the limitations of his individuality, but nobody who saw this actor play the part of a baker—or was it a milkman?—in a little piece founded upon an episode of a story by Charles Dickens, can have failed to remark that Mr. Hawtreys, who is ordinarily so smooth-tongued, so easy in his movements, became awkward the moment he attempted to sink his own personality in a character; and the best upholstered man on the stage carried himself in his unfamiliar costume with the self-consciousness of a young gentleman at his first fancy-dress ball. The three popular actors I have named are not actors of the most pretentious kind, but they have each and all an attractive personality, which is the next best thing to a great talent. Mr. Hawtreys, at least, persuades you always that the parts he plays could not possibly be

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played better. He is, perhaps, a great actor in a small way.

In Charles Hawtrey the new style of acting, as distinguished from the old, reaches its highest degree of perfection. Mr. Hawtrey is natural, or nothing ; he gives you the impression that he is so much himself that you can hardly believe he is acting ; he never raises his voice too high nor lowers it unduly. His effects are calculated to a nicety. It is not a great thing to be natural in the circumstances in which Charles Hawtrey is usually seen on the stage, but it is not so easy as it looks ; it may be done well or ill, and Hawtrey is the head of that school of acting in which the emotions are not studied. Kean is said to have restored nature to the stage, but the actors of the present day are not, like Caleb Plummer's dolls, "as near natur' as possible," they are simply not actors, but only themselves. There is hardly a young comedian on the stage who is capable of playing anything but one type of character. It may be said that this is the fault, not so much of the young actors themselves, as of the dramatists, but it is not so much the fault of the dramatists as of the

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actor-manager. The young people get no chance of distinguishing themselves. They have no opportunity of learning their business. The experienced actor, who may, by force of contrast, betray the defects of the leading actor, is not so much wanted as the young gentleman who can walk the stage "like a thing of life" without noticing that people are looking at him. He has only to be natural and (if he can) to keep his hands out of his pockets.

The desire to be natural is taking all the spirit out of acting. Yet an artifice of the very worst kind has been introduced by the vanity of the actor-manager, who has come to consider every word he utters of so much consequence that a slow delivery is now quite common on the stage. This is not natural. In real life people do not wait, as they do on the stage, till a sentence is finished before answering it. But one looks only for suggestion, not for ordinary natural effects on the stage, and we excuse the stage convention of uninterrupted speech as we may excuse the convention of bringing baggage into a drawing-room—the usual manner of suggesting that a person has come from a distance or

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is starting on a journey. The theatre is a world of conventions. "Pray, what is the reason," said Charles II. one afternoon at the theatre, "that we never see a rogue in a play, but odds fish ! they always clap him on a black periwig, when it is well known that one of the greatest rogues in England always wears a fair one ?" We may excuse anything on the stage except the errors in syntax and orthoepy to which the new-fangled idea of deliberate speech directs particular notice. The intention is obviously to concentrate attention upon the speaker, apart from the rest of the company. A play necessarily suffers from this practice, for the movement is thus impeded in turn by every person on the stage. The principle is applied to Shakespere as well as to lesser authors, with the result that a dulness is produced which is not inherent in the plays, and this dulness is intensified in a Shakesperian performance by the incapacity of our actors generally to deliver verse. They have no sense of poetry—no imagination. The how-d'ye-do style of acting, indeed, has banished the classic drama from the stage. The few

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surviving actors of the Old School are the last depositaries of the traditions which have been handed down from generation to generation. Of the "business" of the stage (religiously preserved in the old prompt-books) which can only be acquired by practice and study, the nerveless New School knows nothing.

CHAPTER II.

THE STATUS OF THE ACTOR.

THE scenic arts of the theatre have progressed in our time, but the illusion of mere acting—the limitations of the actor's own arts—cannot be said to have been extended. For the improvement in scenery the actor, as an independent artist, cannot be praised any more than he is to be contemned because the plays in which he appears do not reach the literary standard of the Elizabethan dramatists. In those spacious times, the drama, to be sure, existed more or less by favour of the cultivated classes. One has only to glance at the advertisements of the theatres in our daily papers to see that, exalted as the actor's state may be, his achievements nowadays are not of a particularly lofty character.

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And what is this fine art—this talent for acting? What is the art of acting but the cultivation of the very meanest of faculties—the faculty of imitation? Was not James II. acting when he escaped from London disguised as a girl; and was it not only indifferent acting that betrayed him, when he was discovered on board ship in a position that was not, so to say, in the character? In the course of his wanderings, Charles Edward played many parts, male and female, and appears to have played them uncommonly well. We are all actors—more or less. The little child who tells a lie is an actor, and it depends solely upon his success as an actor, whether he is believed or not. The playgoer may recall performances by children among the pleasantest of his recollections of the theatre. Is there any other art of which it can be said that the mystery of it is within the comprehension of a little child? The infant actor or actress, however, is by no means rare. And not only do children excel in acting, but the fine art of make-believe is the only one of all the fine arts in which women can claim to be equally

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successful with men, and even more so. We need not go back to Rachel or Sarah Siddons, with Madame Sarah Bernhardt, Signora Eleonora Duse, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell to point the argument. In Poetry, Music, Painting, where are the women among the immortals?

As for the mental effort involved in the exercise of this fine art of pretending to be somebody else, a famous French actor—M. Got—has publicly expressed the opinion that not only are intellectual endowments unnecessary to the actor, but the less brains he has the better.

Macready certainly had no lofty opinion of his calling, and in telling the story of his career, he regrets that fate—which had made him the most popular actor of his day!—had not made him a barrister. He seems always to be inventing excuses for his calling. He puts the best face on it when he claims for the player the art “to fathom the depths of character, to trace its latent motives, to feel its finest quiverings of emotion, to comprehend the strengths that are hidden under words, and then possess one’s self of the actual mind of the individual man.” Assuming

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that the actor can do this, is he not simply giving expression to ideas put into his head by an author? We can all feel, as keenly as the actor feels, if we cannot all give pantomimic expression to our feeling. But it is the thought, not the actor, but of the author, which inspires our feeling. The actor is the mask, not the mind. At most, he stands to the play in the relative position of the singer and instrumentalist to the work of the composer. The profession of music, in the purely executive capacity, is not less arduous and assuredly not less elevating than that of acting; yet the most distinguished performers in grand opera, adept alike in singing and in the less exacting arts of the theatre, make no such bold pretensions as the mere actor. Sir Henry Irving, whose influence in our day has made itself felt off the stage, even more than on, challenged "the acute student" in one of those public addresses which it has become part of the actor's business to deliver before learned societies, "to ponder over Hamlet's renunciation of Ophelia . . . and say that he has learned more from his meditations than

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he could be taught by players whose intelligence is equal to his own." This, it appears to me, is putting the art of the actor above that of the poet himself. It is not in the power of any actor playing Hamlet to convey more of the author's meaning to the mind, or even so much, as the student may discover for himself in reading Shakespere's play. We have seen many Hamlets; but Shakespere's Hamlet is still the best. Shakespere's Hamlet is better than the meditative Hamlet of Henry Irving, or the gracious Hamlet of Forbes Robertson, to say nothing of the Hamlet of Wilson Barrett—who used to make Hamlet ask, "Is it very cold?" by way of distinguishing his Hamlet from the Hamlets who were not so uncertain of the temperature of the night air at Elsinore—and the Hamlet of Beerbohm Tree, and the Hamlet of Murray Carson.

To some minds, incapable of appreciating the dignity of the actor's art, it may seem to put a man to a poor use to dress him up and paint his face, and to ask him, night after night, to strut about the stage, or to be cuffed for the purpose of making his fellow-creatures

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laugh. The actor may excite higher feelings than those of derision, of course ; but is the first-rate low comedian a lesser artist than the second-rate high comedian ? Where does the art of acting begin ? Where does it cease to be dignified and artistic ? See an actor, a really good actor, in a really bad play, and you may realize at once the limitations of his art. In a good play, the measure of an actor's skill and understanding may be taken from the manner in which he expresses the author's intentions. In a bad play, the greatest actor leaves one with a sense of the sterility of his own art. What can he do ? Nothing. Sir Henry Irving is understood to ~~approve of a subsidized theatre and a school for acting, though he is opposed in these matters to the generality of his fellows.~~ Irving, always jealous for the honour of his calling, no doubt sees in these projects the means of securing for the stage a kind of formal professional recognition. The fine art of acting is distinguished from the other fine arts by the fact that it is not an art that is seriously studied, but is picked up, as it were, promiscuously. As a learned profession it

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is the only one for which the student is not prepared by a long and expensive curriculum. But what is there in acting to be taught? An actor may add to his natural gifts many accomplishments and graces, which may be acquired by diligent practice. That he should study the humanities is hardly necessary. Declamation, deportment, dancing, the use of the foils, all these things may give a polish to his work. But are they much more considered than they used to be? Are they so much considered as they used to be? At one of our most fashionable theatres two actors may at the time of writing be seen engaged in a duel—for which they had been specially “coached” by an expert—and the effect is such as to have suggested to not too nice a critic that if they could not make a better show of it with swords they should fight with pistols. In the use of their language they are not more expert, and it would be unfair to attribute to the author of the piece the interchange of remarks, when one of the characters says, “You have drank too much,” and another answers with no humorous intention, “You

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have spoken correctly." A school of acting, to be sure, might compel respect for the common rules of syntax; but the merest elementary knowledge is not indispensable to success on the stage. The actor who thinks the French tragedian Talma was a Roman general may continue to think so without detriment to his art.

~~That an academic training is no equipment for the profession of acting, has been conclusively established by the appearance on the stage of late of many young men who have been prepared for life at the public schools and the Universities. The accession of young men of this class to the profession which has offered them an easier means than another of gaining a living, has given to the stage a certain social standing it never had before. Or is it not rather one of the results of the glorification of the stage above other and more exacting professions that young men have turned from more serious pursuits to the less toilsome business of the theatre?~~

Other young gentlemen of good breeding and not remarkable for their intellectual attainments, have joined the profession and

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have assisted in bringing better manners into the theatre—behind the scenes, that is to say. The actors' dressing-rooms at our fashionable theatres are not what they used to be ; but whilst our best actors, whose early observations of life were made from a stool in an office or from behind a counter, have but practised their art in imitating the superior airs of the new recruits, it cannot be pretended that these young men have shown the same aptitude for acquiring the qualities that make an actor. Their spiritless acting has been described as a "natural" style. It certainly does not come from training. Nor does it represent much of a mental or artistic effort. This change can only exercise an enervating influence on the stage. For whilst these young men are extending the sphere of the influence of the theatre, the favourite actor is now hardly less concerned to cut a figure in society than with the pursuit of his art ; and he allows himself no longer any time, any opportunity, for feeding his imagination by contact with the realities, as distinguished from the artificialities, of life.

The actor has been taken up by society.

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No "function"—accepting the word in the sense in which it is misused by the newspapers—is complete without him. He is to be seen everywhere, except in that small circle which is still beyond the range of observation of the newspaper gossips. To that society which seeks notoriety and delights to find its doings chronicled in the newspapers, the actor is freely admitted. It is the application of the principle of reflex advertisement. For this is the Brazen Age of Advertisement ; and it is not soaps and pills only which are brought into public notice by the power of the press.

Even the pushful physician, who is prevented by the etiquette of his profession from advertising on the back page of the papers, advertises himself on the front page among the contributors to this or that magazine. In accepting the actor, society has had to justify to itself this new-born respect and affection for the stage, and so it comes to pass that public taste is degraded by the attempt to raise acting above all the arts, above learning and letters, I will not say in public favour—for that may be patiently endured—but in public esteem.

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Yet the old prejudice lingers, as Lord Rosslyn reminds us in an article, "Why I became an Actor," contributed to a popular newspaper. "Will my family and the world in general taboo me?" was his thought, he says, when he turned to the stage for a living. A comedian was told that a coat of the style he wore had been ordered by another customer. "Was he an actor?" he asked. "No," says the snip, "he was a gentleman." Now an actor, I contend, may be a gentleman in any sense of the word you please. He may be as good a man and as good a citizen as another; there are such actors; but I venture to say that there is in the very nature and circumstances of the actor's calling something that makes it less "worthy," as Mr. Augustine Birrell puts it, than other callings.*

The actor, of course, embraces the actress. I intend no disrespect to the ladies of the theatrical profession in saying so. Actresses may be exposed to temptations which do not beset their sex outside the theatre, but they may resist these temptations, though I

* "Obiter Dicta"—Actors. (Elliott Stock, 1896.)

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believe that no modest young woman who goes on the stage can fail to be shocked at least by the life of the theatre. Things have changed since the time of Sarah Siddons, who thanked Heaven that her sister was going to marry out of the theatrical profession. Yet Miss Mary Anderson, writing in these days, says that her book, "A Few Memories," is designed "more for young girls . . . than for anyone else; to show them that the glitter of the stage is not all gold, and thus to do a little towards making them realize how serious an undertaking it is to adopt a life so full of hardships, limitations, and even dangers." It is to be regretted that the story of Miss Anderson's facile successes on the stage and in society is more likely to turn the head of any stage-struck miss than to convince her of the hardships, limitations, and dangers of theatrical life, as she might be convinced by the inglorious history of the undistinguished members of the theatrical profession—the twenty thousand persons who derive a precarious living from the stage. But all our popular actresses are not as exemplary in their lives as the respected heads

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of the profession—Mary Anderson, Lady Bancroft, Mrs. Kendal, Ellen Terry, Mrs. Bernard Beere, Mrs. John Wood. If I do not name the leading actresses of the minor theatres, it is not because I mean to imply that they are less estimable than the rest. The burlesque actress of yesterday may become the comedian of to-morrow. The incomparable Mrs. Bancroft of comedy was the “saucy Wilton” of the old days of burlesque at the Strand Theatre, where, in the words of the present Poet Laureate,*

—saucy Wilton winks her way
And says the more the less she has to say.

But there are women on the stage whose character is hardly less questionable than their talent. A young actress who cannot choose her company must take service with such as these. They meet day by day, and the young actress finds that neither inside the theatre, nor outside, does anybody shun the woman upon whom she may begin by looking with loathing and end by regarding with indifference—or even with envy of the solid advantages such a one enjoys. The stage offers an honest living to

* “The Season.” By Alfred Austin. (Hardwicke, 1861.)

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thousands of hard-working people, and it has attracted, in these days, a number of young women of good education and good manners. But it is not from that class that the great actresses have come. The early training of an easy life is not favourable to the development of the talent for acting. A life of less restraint ; a life in which the art is cultivated of giving expression freely to the feelings ; a life in which the sympathies are allowed to expand, and the faculty of observation is sharpened ; such a life is more likely to make an actress. Her own experiences, and the life of the people around her, are the only books from which she can learn the mysteries of her art, and the less restriction imposed upon her in procuring herself emotions, the better she may imitate them. We only ask to see the imitation. I do not say that there are not on the stage women and men as virtuous as in any other calling ; but I asseverate that there is no other profession in which a woman, or a man, openly living an evil life, can command so much honour and respect. There is no other profession in which a position of authority may be acquired so easily. The story has been told in the

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Law Courts of the negotiations carried on by a capitalist with an actor of position for providing a lady, for a substantial consideration, with a leading part in a comedy. Now I venture to say that it would be possible to provide a lady, with such interests to support her, not only with a part, but with a theatre ; and if a lady with no particular talent entered into management to-morrow, upon such terms, I believe that her "enterprise," to say nothing of her "genius," would obtain for her a position superior to that of the most accomplished member of her company. I do not for an instant believe that full knowledge of the circumstances would deprive her of the services of any number of honourable men and women. There is no other profession in which such laxity exists. There is no other profession in which open defiance of decorum is treated with such absolute indifference. A young lady who occupied a dressing-room along with some others came in tears to the author of the piece in which she appeared, to complain that one of her companions had said she was "no better than she ought to be." "But you are," said the cynical author.

Virtue—the virtue which takes that name among all the virtues—is of course not essential to an actress in the practice of her art. Nobody ever pretended it was. We could call famous actresses, dead and living, to witness it. M. Henri de Rochefort declined to fight the son of a great actress on the ground that his opponent might be his own child, for all he knew. But this is a story of a French actress, and in France the theatrical profession has not reached the moral or the intellectual pinnacle in the social economy to which it has been elevated in this country. When the question was raised not long ago in France of “decorating” an actress, it was frankly stated by the minister that he declined to accept the responsibility of creating such a precedent. The point of the argument may be turned against ministers, who should be above suspicion, as well as against actresses; but in France everything is freely excused in an actress except want of talent; and it is with her acting only, not with her personal character, that the public should have any concern.

The best of actresses are not invariably, and

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never have been, exemplars of propriety. A very distinguished French actress, who has not fashioned her conduct upon the principle of "assume a virtue if you have it not," has freely expressed her unaffected surprise at being admitted as a guest in the houses of her English admirers. In her own country, society is more exclusive. But then the profession in France does not include so many women whose lives are pure as may be found among our English actresses. I have before me as I write, a letter, written by the late Alexandre Dumas *fils*, who replies in the following terms to a lady who had asked him to help her to get on the stage :—
"Whenever a girl who springs from the lowest classes of society shall come to me," he says, "to ask for my assistance to secure her admission to the stage, if she is pretty and gifted, I will give her the aid she asks for, but I shall always refuse my assistance to any young girl who declares that she is of good family, respectable, and of independent fortune, as I believe that for a girl brought up under such conditions, anything, even death, is better than that abominable existence."

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Touching the question of "Virtue on the stage" (*La vertu au théâtre*), a French newspaper * not long ago invited the opinions of many people who were entitled to speak with authority. M. Jules Claretie, the manager of the Théâtre Français, replied briefly and significantly, "The important thing is to have talent;" Coquelin cadet, the comedian, said frankly, "One may guess at many things when one has the gift for the stage, but it is better for an actress to have seen or to have experienced herself the emotions described by dramatists. So, no virgins on the stage—or as few as possible!" There you have the opinion of the manager of the first theatre in the world, and the opinion of the first comedian in France. I have said that there are fewer virtuous women on the stage in France than in England, but our actresses, on the other hand, are not superior as actresses to the French. Sydney Smith said of Spencer Perceval that it would have been better if Mr. Perceval had been less constant at divine worship and less devoted to his wife, if he had whipped his boys and owed his

* *Le Figaro*, Jan. 13th, 1897.

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last quarter's butcher's bills, if only he had saved his country. In acting, the domestic virtues may be left out of the question. Homage to morality! Let it be admitted that our stage nowadays is graced by many women who are good wives and good mothers. But where are the good actresses?

The private life of an actor belongs to himself, and to his friends, or should do so. But when our popular actors and their leading ladies enter into society and claim a place in public life—when they seek, not to avoid attention but to attract it—are we not entitled to demand of them the same respect for the laws social as we impose upon other people? What should we say of a doctor who went everywhere accompanied by his leading lady patient? But with actors and actresses, we must receive them without asking questions. Society does not inquire after the actor's wife or the actress's husband. If we look over their informalities, how can we still be severe upon those of other charming people? We may soon become too little censorious.

It is not the man, then, but the actor who

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is the figure in society. It is not for his intellectual attainments that he is honoured outside the sphere of his art, but simply as an actor ; only that and nothing more. He takes a place in the world to which he has no right ; and in the attention which is given to him and his affairs, worthier things are neglected. I will not say discouraged, for of all the arts the actor's art is the only one in which the artist is deprived of the purely selfish delight of inspiration ; unless, indeed, inspiration, with actors, is a thing to be put on as easily as paint and grease.

Although his work leaves him a world of leisure, his diversions are not commonly of an elevating character. His tastes are not literary ; there is no reason why they should be. It would be a bad thing for him, as things go, if they were. As acting is now said to be sister to all the arts, for the sake of the family connection, if not of his position as a public man, the actor shows a catholic interest in all sorts of things by appearing in all the public places, described (with a list of the company present) in all the public prints. He is a gay, boon companion. He has, as

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Boswell says, "an animation and a relish of existence," which make him welcome in our hours of ease. He is just the fellow to help to drive dull care away, but he is not the kind of man to keep it company. There are actors who are men of cultivated minds and good manners, who do not go much into that society in which they can have no real part, whilst the very nature of their calling keeps them at work when other people are at leisure, and leaves them idle when all the rest of the world is at work. They live their lives in an orderly fashion, following an arduous vocation without any nonsensical artistic pretensions, and with no desire to be patronized. It is they who give dignity to the actor's calling; not the swaggering actor who must everlastingly be talking about his art, and still acting before the public when he is off the stage. "The poor player," as Lamb says, "should be known to the public only in his panoply." In the character of a man of fashion, whose doings are communicated to the newspapers for publication, he is in a false position. He holds his place in society by an uncertain tenure. He is in it,

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but not of it. It is no longer a rare experience in these days for a young nobleman to marry an actress—or, at least, to engage to do so. But I shall not consider the actor's position firmly established in society till we hear that a popular comedian has married the daughter of a peer of the realm. And that, of course, with the sanction of the young lady's parents.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENT.

THE artistic temperament is supposed to explain, to excuse, and even to justify, a good deal that may seem irregular to ordinary mortals in the life of our gifted fellow-creatures who fall short of—or as some foolish people say, rise superior to—the standard of conduct accepted by the rest of the community. Not the least unendurable of those eccentricities of genius which sometimes make one wish (as Thomas Carlyle says) the devil would fly away with the fine arts, is that the artist becomes utterly insensible to the small affairs of life in his contemplation of his great purposes. He is absorbed in his work ; he is careless of everything else. He lives apart from the rest of us, in a world of

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his own, peopled by the creatures of his imagination, and finds the joy of life in his moments of inspiration. That is the artistic temperament. Now the actor, we are told, is an artist too, own brother to the poet and the painter, and, as such, he claims the indulgence allowed for the artistic temperament, which is an excuse for everything. Yet the world in which the actor lives is, in effect, a world in which the artistic instinct is grossly offended at every turn.

To begin with, the actor is deprived of that independence which is essential to the very existence of the artist. In the time and subject of his work the actor has no more choice than a musical instrument has in the selection of the compositions to which it is to give utterance. There are comic and serious and romantic actors, as there are banjos, violins, and guitars ; there are good actors and bad, as there are different qualities in musical instruments ; but the actor who allowed himself to be governed by an artistic temperament (which is not a thing to be easily resisted) would not find regular employment on the stage. An artist is,

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above everything, a creature of impulse ; the slave, not the master, of his inspirations. Yet we are asked to believe that this or that actor of genius—and there is no art in connection with which the word is so frequently used—can arrange, as it were, to be inspired every night of the week at eight o'clock, and on Wednesdays at 3 p.m. Surely the clerk who goes to his office punctually every morning is not more of an automaton than the actor who repeats the same words, the same antics, night after night, week after week, month after month.

The actor's thoughts are not his own. He cannot even call his face his own. Yet the artistic temperament manifests itself in the assertion, not in the suppression, of individuality. On the stage that principle does not hold good. Those actors who use their positions as managers to have their plays made, as they do their coats, to suit their figure, do not discover any acuter artistic sense than the rest. All the art in acting lies not in adapting a part to your peculiarities, but in subduing yourself to the character defined by the author. Nobody will pretend

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that Mr. Arthur Roberts is a better actor than another simply because he is always himself. Still it is his wonderful, original individuality that has made Mr. Roberts one of the most popular players of our time. Indeed there is, in the ready invention of this eminent droll, a surer indication of an artistic temperament than you may find in the carefully prepared graces of this popular actor or the studied postures of that other. Mr. Roberts may be surprised to hear that there is something of the genuine feeling of the artist in the obvious enjoyment he affords to himself. It is the privilege of an artist to find his greatest pleasure in his work, which he produces without reference to other people's tastes. A poet writes to please himself; he "does but sing because he must." He sings his song with never a care for a listener. Not so the actor. No man, in his senses, can act simply to please himself; and a lunatic asylum is the only place for the unhappy wretch who plays the Emperor of China, or the Missing Heir, or a Cracked Teapot, for his own sole satisfaction.

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Absorbing interest in himself—in himself apart from his art—is characteristic, not of the artist, but of the actor ; and to describe that condition a better term than artistic temperament is vanity. Vanity, pyramidal vanity. The actor's art (unlike any other) depends upon personal charm, and that is one reason perhaps why the actor has a larger share of vanity than is commonly supposed to fall to his sex. Men are not only quite as vain as women in the theatrical profession, but in other foibles, which may be more easily forgiven in a woman, there is nothing to choose between them. It is not only the pretty actress who receives notes and presents at the stage door, for the actor also has his unknown admirers. Whatever may be said against the stage as a calling for women, it is worse for a man than for a woman. A man must sacrifice something of manliness in the constant rivalry between the sexes—in the competition for admiration. A woman may lose a certain indefinable charm of womanliness, of reserve, in the free intercourse of the theatre, but she acquires, at least, a sense of independence, which is not a bad thing,

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though it may be too emphatically asserted. The men are jealous of the women as well as of each other. It is in human nature that no man desires to exalt a rival above himself, but it is to be deplored, in the public interest, that so much power has passed into the hands of actors in leading positions. In saying so I make no doubt I shall have the sympathy of every ambitious actor who is not his own manager. It may be said that it is to a manager's advantage to engage a good company, but it is clearly against that manager's interest, as an actor, to allow anybody but himself to take the leading part in his own theatre. Managers have done such a thing, but a survey of the London theatres at the present moment does not afford many illustrations of such disinterested service to their art. At more theatres than one the leading lady has evidently not been chosen for her exceptional talent.* That the mana-

* Mr. E. F. Spence, a dramatic critic, speaking at a public meeting, is reported to have said :—" Within the last five years plays had been ruined because of the principle that kissing goes by favour. This fact blocked the advance of young actresses of indisputable ability."—*Daily News*, April 10, 1899.

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gers of the London theatres who are also actors are not invariably the most accomplished of their class may be seen any day by reference to the advertisements in the newspapers. But it is no part of the policy of an actor who is his own manager to be beaten on his own ground. This is not the least of the disadvantages of the system of the actor-manager as compared with that of the manager who is only a man of business.

The actor who is his own manager is not always a good actor and is sometimes but an indifferent manager. For the vanity of the actor is allowed to get the better of the manager. It is a common mistake among actors to believe that a long part is a strong part. As a matter of fact, those parts in which an actor is incessantly before the audience, are not the most effective; the impression made by an actor is not diminished by giving the audience the opportunity of wishing him back again on the stage. The actor, however, does not realize that out of sight is not necessarily out of mind; and I have heard of cases in which an actor in the position to dictate terms to a dramatist has

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insisted upon taking speeches out of the mouth of one character to put them into his own. Not infrequently an actor attaches too much value to details of no particular dramatic significance. I remember a play in which there was a scene which had no other purpose than to bring the leading actor on the stage in the last moments of the performance. He had simply to show his head in a picture frame—a paltry theatrical effect, and not novel. But there he was. The actor would lose nothing of the credit of his performance by allowing his understudy to go on in that scene; and the piece would lose nothing of its significance by cutting it out altogether. Indeed a clever young actor playing the same part in the travelling company, disregarded this theatrical effect, and was content to be represented by a portrait instead of showing his face in a picture frame.

It is not only by the undue elaboration of his own part that the actor, who is master in his own house, seeks to direct attention to himself. The centre of the stage might almost be said to be reserved for some actors in their own theatre. And one manager goes beyond this.

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We have heard of people being left-handed ; but one of our most presumptuous actors extends that sinister distinction to his lower extremities, and has the habit of stepping out with his left leg when another would use the right. A touch of this sort may escape the observation of the audience, who feel the effect without noticing the cause. This is one manner (literally) of standing in the way of the others, for on the stage, where every movement is considered, such a trick not only disconcerts his companions, but brings into undue prominence the actor who thrusts himself obtrusively forward. The best actor in the world is but a component part of a play, and an artist aiming at perfection would feel constrained to show more consideration for the sense of proportion, which is called "ensemble" in the language of the theatre. A better appreciation of the virtue of "ensemble" would soon destroy the one-part play, for which a great actor is the only justification. But the actor-manager has no great discernment of the value or merits of a play. Otherwise we should see fewer failures and fewer unworthy successes. An artistic tem-

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perament would revolt against the rubbish he presents ; for it is no exaggeration to say that nine plays out of ten have nothing whatever to do with art. If our actors were the artists they pretend to be, they could never content themselves, as Mr. Augustine Birrell has pointed out, with the showy parts in which they achieve their greatest successes. But the rare, indefinable quality of taste which is artistic perception, is no part of the actor's temperament. A theatrical paper which speaks *pro domo*, related the following anecdote with no appreciation of the inherent vulgarity of the episode it described. In the scene of the coronation in *The Prisoner of Zenda* at the St. James's Theatre, one of the Ambassadors is asked what news there is from England ; and on the day of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, his Excellency introduced the fresh remark, "Oxford has won the boat race." Upon this the pretender to the throne of Ruritania wittily replied, "Then I must send a telegram of congratulation." The point of this brilliant repartee, of course, lay in the indirect allusion

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to the German Emperor. The artistic temperament of the theatre is illustrated in this story, which also shows what an author may have to endure at the hands of an actor. To realize the precise value of importing the humours of Christmas pantomime into the realms of Mr. Anthony Hope's fancy, one must try to imagine the effect of the introduction of such a passage into the novel itself.

It is in the name of art that such stupid things are done. They talked less of Art in the palmy days of old. When the Haymarket Theatre was opened under the management, as they were then, of Mrs. and Mr. Bancroft—in an art in which the sexes are equally distinguished, let us give precedence to talent—there was an outcry against the abolition of the pit, and Mr. Bancroft frankly explained that the change had been made for the purpose of bringing more money into the house. That was the business of a theatrical manager, as he understood it. Under a later management, the Haymarket Theatre became a Temple of Art, with the actor as High Priest, and if the manager

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himself had written the pieces which he sometimes described, for the edification of the critics, as "masterpieces," he could not have been more proud of them. But the actor-manager also has a soul which is not above business, and it has been stated publicly, on the eve of producing a Shakesperian play, that the intention is not merely to gratify the "fastidious," for whose golden opinion all other artists are eager, but to "please the ladies." His true intent is all for their delight. His design is not to "bore the audience"—that is to say, not to allow Shakespere to do so. Therefore he resolves to "cut" Shakespere's "boastful rhetoric" and give them—scenery! A theatrical manager is certainly not unwise in trying to please the ladies. It is they who are the most considerable patrons of the drama. It is they who choose the theatre to which their husbands shall take them. Therefore let us please the ladies. But what would be said of any other artist who professed such intentions? What would be said of a painter whose special anxiety was to "please the ladies"? We know what is thought of those

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novelists who make it their business to do so. "To please the ladies" may be good business ; but it is not art.

The plain truth is that all the fine talk about art is belied in practice every day of the week. With the actor, the artistic temperament does not imply any such repugnance to sordid considerations which more sensitive natures feel to their cost. But it is as a manager, presumably, that the artistic temperament of the actor finds nothing in the way of its ample development. If we find him such as he is in such circumstances, what shall be said of the hundreds of poor devils, who must give more thought to earning their bread than to the cultivation of an artistic temperament? For the artistic temperament, I suppose, is not exclusively reserved for the half-dozen actors who are their own managers, though we do not hear much talk of it from the rest.

It is the actor with the least vanity in his calling who gives dignity to his profession. A visitor to a great French actor was complimenting him upon a performance which was superb. "Superb!"

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said the actor, "but you should see my roses!" Yet I have heard inferior actors talk as if they thought it a greater thing to have played Hamlet than to have written Hamlet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DRAMA.

How many plays have you seen in the course of your experience of the theatre? How many can you remember? Can you say that any action of your life was ever influenced by any one of them? It was claimed, if I may trust my memory, for a drama produced at Drury Lane Theatre, that it moved to repentance a dishonest jockey, whose confession was posted all over London as a moral lesson for the public and an advertisement for the piece. Some years ago such "confessions" were commonly used to recommend dramas of a sensational sort, which have done their work so well (or so ill) that we now hear no more of these conversions, except in small country towns. Not that it is no longer claimed for the drama that it exercises an influence for good.

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The theatre generally in our day is, in the words of Artemus Ward, a "moral show." A popular dramatist, who claims for the writer of plays a purpose which is utterly foreign to the uses of the stage, was once told by a prelate who sat next him at dinner—and desired, no doubt, to say something agreeable to his neighbour—that the theatre should exercise an influence only second to the Church. To which the dramatist, who tells the story himself, made this reply: "Why place it second?" Why, indeed? Why place it anywhere in relation to the Church?

In an article on "The Bible and the Stage,"* from which I derive the foregoing edifying anecdote, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, to be sure, adduces as an argument in favour of "religious" plays the old story that "our English Drama sprang from mystery-plays, which were quite widely allowed without any thought of irreverence." Mr. Jones may be reminded that in those days there were no West-end theatres, and no moral comedies by Mr. Jones, to suggest the comparison. With regard to the relation of the mystery to

* *New Review*, February, 1893.

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the stage-play of to-day, I can only say, as the philologist said of the derivation of the French word "jour" from the Latin "dies," that it is "diablement changé en route." Further, Mr. Jones may be informed that these "mysteries" had fallen into disrepute long before the Reformation, on account of their irreverence and ribaldry, of which ample evidence exists in the accessible specimens of these plays of the fifteenth century.* A still more ancient pedigree might have been found for the Drama. Its descent from the Dionysia of the Greeks might be held as reasonably to justify both the devotional drama and the worship of the pot-house Bacchus which is so conspicuous in the merry pieces of the minor theatres, with their everlasting humours of the public-house, the pawn-shop, and the race-course.

Not only religion, but politics also, Mr. Jones claims as the domain of the Drama. "To-day our modern drama," he says, "should lay bold hands upon every province of human life and thought, and be satisfied with nothing

* See the Townley Mysteries, published by the Surtees Society.

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less than sovereign sway and masterdom over the whole realm." Mr. Jones asks too much. We shall always be satisfied with less. It will be time to close the theatres when the Drama begins "to lay bold hands" upon these things. For the moment, however, I have no apprehension of anything of the sort. Such things are beyond the reach of the Drama; and instead of laying bold hands on anything new, my complaint is rather that the Drama is keeping its hands in its pockets. I cannot share the joy expressed by Mr. Jones, in writing on the modern Drama.* "It is most gratifying," he says, "to notice how, during the last ten years, the Drama has been weaving connections with all the roots and supports of our national life—with science and religion, with art, philosophy, and literature." I have not remarked that it is so. And to Mr. Jones's pragmatistical assertions I have only one word of reply, and that is, to borrow honest Burchell's favourite expression, "Fudge!"

~~At the time of writing, I find, on reference to the advertisements in the daily newspapers, that of nineteen theatres, in the West End~~

* *Nineteenth Century*, October, 1893.

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of the town, no less than six are playing "musical comedies;" three are given up to English translations of French plays, and the same number to theatrical versions, more or less clumsy, of popular novels; six to English plays, good (1), bad (1), and indifferent (4); and one to comic opera. This last, and a pretty piece of honest, homely sentiment, are the sole present manifestations of refinement and literary taste in the native drama as it is represented in the capital. Mr. Jones plays his own hand, and is clearly not disposed to leave the honour and glory of the stage to the actor, whose pretensions are hardly less arrogant than his. The stage has been attacked, and as zealously defended, in all ages, but we do not know that the case has ever been more ridiculously over-stated, on one side or the other, than by Mr. Jones in his contributions to the magazines and his public addresses.* He is as extravagant on one side in his demands for the drama, as Pryune, on the other, in his monstrously dull and learned "Histriomatrix," with its formidable array

* "The Renascence of the Drama." By Henry Arthur Jones. (Macmillan.)

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of classic and patristic lore, now seems in his Scourge for the Stage Players.

All this nonsense about the moral and educational influence of the Drama is the dry rot—using the term in the scientific sense—of the stage. For plays, written with any other purpose than that of entertaining an audience, are false to the one stable principle of writing for the theatre. The public do not go to the theatre to improve their minds, but simply to divert them. The free libraries and the learned societies will take the place of the theatres when they do. The dramatist who wishes to instruct the playgoer in new theories of morals, instead of to illustrate life in action, should abandon the stage for the lecture-room. As yet we observe no deep philosophical designs in our dramatists, least of all in Mr. Jones. Nor do we see any peculiar qualification in our actors and actresses for expounding philosophy. It is in the simulation of our persons and manners and emotions that all their art lies; and in this mimicry I decline to see any profound moral influence. It is simply the imitation that we admire in good acting. If it had the significance of

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reality for more than the passing moment, instead of going out to supper after the play, we should all want to go home and nurse our grief. It is this mockery of all genuine feeling which induces the more thoughtful to look contemptuously upon the actor. Sir Henry Irving tells an anecdote, bearing upon this fact, in his preface to the translation of Diderot's famous "Paradoxe." The English actor makes but a feeble stand against the French philosopher : and he seems to me to give his case away, when he attempts to defend the actor against the charge of insensibility by telling how Macready, playing *Virginus*, after the death of his daughter, confessed that his real experience gave a new force to his acting in the most pathetic situations of the play. I am inclined to believe that Macready could play the part with all the force necessary without any such rare incentive. But what has Sir Henry Irving to say of the comic actor who appears the personification of merriment under equally trying circumstances ? We know what Diderot would say. I shall be content still to get arguments from Diderot, and acting from Irving.

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Although it is now the fashion to pretend that the Drama possesses a moral and educational influence, the dramatists of our time can hardly be said to reveal a profounder knowledge of human passions than the old dramatists, whose works have survived by reason of their great understanding. If serious discussions of religious, ethical, and political questions have not occupied the attention of the great dramatists of the past, it is because these dramatists have realized that the stage is no place for such discussions, and that it is not in argument, but in the expression of the passions, that the actor makes his effects. The intellectual qualifications for directing the thought of the generation are not conspicuous in the dramatists of the present day, to say nothing of the theatrical managers and the actors. When a dramatist, or a theatrical manager, or an actor, as the case may be, talks vaingloriously of a play being "above the heads" of the public, you may take it as a rule that it is simply beneath their notice.

I do not mean to imply that the Drama can have no influence at all. But I decline to accept it as a considerable moral force.

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In Japan the dramatists have been for hundreds of years satirizing the depravity of the priests and the avarice of the people, yet the priests remain to this day as depraved and the people as avaricious as ever. The Drama might conceivably exercise an influence to the extent of maintaining public taste and manners. By familiarity with what is good the playgoer might be brought even to dislike what is not good. But the work of influencing the public mind would be an expensive business which no manager would be justified in undertaking. And the manager who addressed himself particularly to the cultured would have to change his bills very often. The theatrical managers, who are men of business, recognize that fact, and it is their aim, as men of business, to attract as many customers as they can to their shops. A literary drama is impossible under existing conditions. A national theatre—or, since Augustus Harris claimed that description for Drury Lane, a state-aided theatre—might attract to the stage writers of greater literary capacity, and such a theatre might by weight of authority exercise an influence, especially if it could secure the extra weight of patronage

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—such as the Imperial Institute, which has no great claim upon our respect, receives in its competition with the unsubsidized places of public amusement. Such a consideration is by no means without influence upon the vulgar, as the managers of the theatres show by the eagerness with which they communicate to the papers the news that a member of the royal family has visited the theatre. But the artistic value of a play is the least consideration.

The production of "Robespierre," at the Lyceum, for instance, was made the occasion of an astounding manifestation of feeling by the public and the press. One newspaper asserted that the appearance of Sir Henry Irving in a new play by M. Victorien Sardou was an event of not less importance than the appearance of Robespierre himself was in the history of France, and the same exaggeration of emotion was expressed in a not less reprehensible fashion by the public who stood at the doors of the theatre all through the night before the first performance. And what came they out to see? Apart from the actor, whose return certainly brought back to the theatre something of distinction which "the profession" had lacked in his absence; apart

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from the actor, what shall be said of the play, but that it was obviously intended by the author "for exportation."

In the intellectual movement of the age, our first theatre has little more influence than another. What is the literary record of the Lyceum in our time? In twenty years of management at the Lyceum what has Sir Henry Irving, with his great opportunities, done for the Drama? For the Drama cannot live on old masterpieces alone. How many plays has he introduced to the stage which are likely to survive the memories of his acting? How many living dramatists have contributed to his repertory? This I say without disparagement of his excellent work as an actor and as a stage-manager. But in considering the moral and educational influence of the Drama it is not the art of the actor that counts. That is elevated or degraded at the will of the dramatist. The performances of Shakespere's plays at the Lyceum, of course, have no reference whatever to the new ideals; their moral and educational influence is no new thing. It is such as it ever was. No more, no less.

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If the elevating influences of the Drama of the present day are inappreciable, its demoralizing effects are only too plain. That so many of the London theatres are now given up to nondescript plays—artless, formless, and aimless—called “musical comedies,” is but the operation of an inexorable economic law which theatrical managers cannot resist. It is a truth, which you will not find in Lucretius, that it is no use damning the nature of things. Still it is a bad day for the Drama, when the public demand for such stuff is so great. I had rather be merry, I confess, with Arthur Roberts than glum with any other. But Mr. Roberts, who graduated at the music halls, has brought the freedom of the music hall into the theatre, and actors, of inferior natural abilities, have copied his manners and speech without being able to imitate his talent. Expressions picked up in the streets and in the “smart” restaurants pass for witticisms, and the base form of humour which obtains in such pieces has a surer influence than that of plays of a more sober character. It is not only public taste that is corrupted by this rubbish, but the language

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itself is corrupted. There you have the influence of the Drama in our day. The slang phrases to which they give currency soon pass out of use, and there is no great evil done ; but the stage suffers a greater degradation in the manner in which the language is spoken, not only in pieces of this class, by too many of the performers, who add to a villainous mispronunciation of their words a reckless disregard for the rules of syntax. The performers in plays of this kind are looked down upon by some actors as if they belonged to a lower order than the rest of the profession. But they come and go, they pass from comedy to burlesque, from burlesque to comedy, with an occasional turn at the music halls. They belong all to one great, honoured profession ; and he is not the least accomplished actor who is master of all the arts of the stage. Arthur Roberts certainly holds as high a place in the favour of the public as any actor in our day. On the occasion of his first appearance at the Lyceum Theatre—when he played the part of a nameless servant in “Money” at a benefit performance—he attracted more attention from a fashionable

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audience than any member of a picked company ; and a comic song from Mr. Roberts was honoured in the same way at a similar entertainment at the Haymarket Theatre. He is the most popular actor in England, with the single exception, perhaps, of Sir Henry Irving.

CHAPTER V.

ACTOR-AUTHOR-MANAGER.

SIR HENRY IRVING is reported to have said to an interviewer that he could not produce *Julius Cæsar* at the Lyceum Theatre because all the actors he wished to engage had become managers. The remark implies a good deal more than the manager of the Lyceum Theatre probably intended ; for the words which were spoken in jest may be taken in earnest. Let us perpend. It is possible, of course, that Sir Henry Irving may have meant only to banter the members of the theatrical profession upon their eagerness to add the cares and responsibilities (to say nothing of the profits) of management to the absorbing study and laborious exercise of their art. Yet our leading actor may have regarded with apprehension, and that not with-

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out reason, the system of every actor his own manager. It bodes no good to the theatre. It may well be that Sir Henry Irving did not wish to let the cat out of the bag ; he may not have considered fully to what it might lead. Let us see how the cat jumps !

The obvious inference is that Shakespere must presently be banished from the stage altogether, for other managers may also find themselves in the same straits. Whether Sir Henry Irving spoke in jest, or whether he spoke in earnest, matters not, for he did not speak without reason, and his remark may be seriously considered. Truly, the present condition of the theatre is not favourable to the poetic drama, which has declined, I believe, not because audiences are incapable of appreciating the poetic drama, but because we have not the actors for it, or the actors for it have not their opportunity. We have no tragedy nowadays because we have no tragedians. It is a common boast that the survey of the drama in these days has extended. It seems to have contracted if one looks in the direction of the drama in its loftiest form. Our actors in these days have so little practice, so

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little experience of the various forms of the drama, that the actor's art is rapidly becoming the art of being himself on the stage, which is not acting at all. Still the case is not quite so bad, perhaps, as may be inferred from Sir Henry Irving's remark, and the much extolled acting of Lewis Waller as Brutus in *Julius Cæsar* justifies the belief that there are still good actors to be found who do not combine the position of manager with that of leading actor.

The actor, who is not his own manager, can hardly expect a manager, who is also an actor, to make room for him ; and the only way for an ambitious actor to obtain a leading position is to place himself at the head of his own company. So long as he remained at the Lyceum, under the management of Sir Henry Irving, Mr. Forbes Robertson could not reasonably hope to find full play for his abilities. He could not very well expect to play Hamlet with Henry Irving in the same company. So Forbes Robertson, in his prime, appeared in a round of characters of subordinate importance with a distinction which encouraged the belief that he was an actor second only to the

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manager, who had, at least, always handsomely acknowledged the high esteem in which he held the young actor's talent. When he passed to the Garrick, Mr. Robertson's talent was not always so well directed, although it was his good fortune, at that theatre, to find himself under the management of an actor who did not wish to play everything, from *jeune premier* to *soubrette*, and was generously content to leave the character of the hero to Mr. Robertson. Not every manager would have accepted such an arrangement. Others in John Hare's place would have produced only plays without a young hero, as our finest actress, in *The Greatest of These*, gave us a piece in which attention was focussed upon a middle-aged lady, whilst the passion of love, which is the manifest centre of interest in the drama, was introduced retrospectively as a bygone affair in the history of the matronly heroine.

The mischief is not only that actors of ability may be prevented from rising by the power of the actor-manager. The actor-manager himself is not always an actor of dazzling ability. It is hardly necessary to

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mention the names of two or three of our young actors who have taken it upon themselves to establish this truth. Once a manager, the actor too often engages his company on the principle defined by the husband of the prima donna—*ma femme et quelques poupées*, only it is not “my wife,” but “myself,” in the case of the actor-manager. I could name several leading theatres at present under the control of actors, in which the managers subordinate their company more or less to their own personal interests, instead of to the interests of the play, which they consider almost invariably as one and the same thing. Not less than Narcissus does the actor admire himself.

The actor, who is his own manager, must perforce be restrained in his artistic impulses by considerations of business, which must always be bad for art, though we are asked to believe that whilst such considerations may induce painters to turn out pot-boilers, they lead theatrical managers to produce—masterpieces. Not that I imagine that it is the business of a theatrical manager to produce masterpieces, which are not for the vulgar, to

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whom the theatre appeals just as much, and perhaps a great deal more, than it does to the cultured. The man in the street is the arbiter of the fate of the drama. With all their grand professions, the theatrical managers recognize that this is so when they say, as Sir Henry Irving says, that the theatre must be carried on as a business or it must fail as an art ; or as another puts it, that it behoves a manager " to keep one eye on the Bankruptcy Court." It is not with " one eye on the Bankruptcy Court " that great works are produced in any other art. With one eye on the Bankruptcy Court, the actor can hardly follow his art with the disinterested devotion which the service of art imperatively demands.

It is a familiar excuse constantly made in the newspapers, and repeated by the managers themselves, that the heavy cares of management must be taken into consideration in judging a new production by an actor-manager. He exhausts his intellectual resources in presenting two or three of his works of art in the course of a year, unless every night's performance—which is, at best, but a copy of

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the same work of art—may be reckoned as a fresh achievement. It is, of course, the business of a theatrical manager “to give the public what it wants,” and the managers are not to be despised for doing so. They are foolish when they do otherwise. Only it is rank nonsense to call that an art in which the inspiration comes not from the artist’s own natural and irresistible bent—not from within, but from without. Is there any other art of which this can be said?

The actor’s art, such as it is, is not likely to improve under these conditions. His work, to be sure, is not of so absorbing a character as to preclude him from occupying his mind with other affairs. That he may be able to attend to all the vexatious details of so complicated a business organization as a theatre, to say nothing of the social obligations of the fashionable actor, shows that his art, at any rate, does not impose over much strain upon his attention. The anxieties of managing a theatre, the annoyances to which the manager may be subjected by the overbearing syndicate which sometimes finds the capital for the enterprise, are not the only

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disturbing influences which may affect the actor in the exercise of his art. There are more serious objections to the actor as manager.

Besides preserving for himself an impregnable position in his own theatre, as the one actor of the company for leading parts, his vanity, over which there is no longer any control, once he is master in his own house, leads him, almost invariably, into all kinds of faults in acting. His defects become aggravated, when there is nobody any longer to correct him but the professional critics. And they have a way of becoming unduly indulgent towards an actor when the actor becomes a manager.

An actor at once takes a leading position in his profession when he becomes a manager, though it is as a man of business, sometimes, rather than as an actor that he receives so much consideration. Yet the manager who is no actor—that is, to be not unnecessarily explicit, who takes no part in the plays he produces—is supposed, by an absurd prejudice, to be of lesser consideration. It is not the manager of the St. James's Theatre, but Mr.

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George Alexander, the eminent actor ; it is not the manager of the Criterion Theatre, but Charles Wyndham, the great comedian, who is supposed to add lustre to the age. But take from the actor generally the management of the theatres, and where would they be then ? Such as had nothing to fear from competition would still hold their position as actors ; but there would be more hope for promotion by merit, and an incentive, that is now lacking, would be given to talent. That a good actor may also be a good manager is not impossible ; but the direction of so extensive and harassing a business as a theatre must surely distract his attention at times from his work as an actor—or *vice versâ*.

The actor-manager is, in some instances, no better actor than another. Is he a better manager ? Mr. Charles Frohman, the American manager, who now exercises a great control over the destinies of the drama, not only in the United States but in this country as well, is not an actor, and Mr. Gatti, of the Adelphi Theatre, has never played *Hamlet*. But are these gentlemen less enterprising managers than the rest, for all that they have not

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the one touch of pride which distinguishes the manager who acts from the manager who manages—are they less zealous in the service of the public, or less discriminating in their judgment of actors and of plays? Mr. George Edwardes is said by the critics to have applied all kinds of refining processes to burlesque and “musical comedy.” He may, or may not, have artistic aspirations, but he has succeeded in pleasing the public, which is the great thing when all is said and done. The Messrs. Gatti, too, provide good fare at the Adelphi (as they do the restaurants under their direction), although the melodramas they have produced have no relation to life or literature. But an intellectual drama can only exist by favour of an intellectual public, and the proportion of intellectual people among the five millions of inhabitants of our capital is not yet large enough to keep a single theatre going all the year round. The cultured class, in which the fashionable and the rich are not necessarily included, are perhaps too little considered. But the actor-manager must live, although we may not see the necessity for his living quite so extravagantly. The actor-

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manager is always telling us that he is a devoted lover of his art ; but he is a prudent lover, who keeps one eye on his mistress and the other on the Bankruptcy Court ; and the theatrical manager does not exist of whom it can be said, as Aristotle said of Thales, that he does not care about making a fortune. An intellectual drama, it would seem, is possible only with such an institution as the Comédie Française, which gives to the theatre something of the loftiness of art, by the high character of the plays it produces and by the training of the actors. I give the dramatist the first place, departing from the usual custom of our own theatre, in which the author is too often of inferior consequence.

The stage suffers in yet another way by the authority which the actor-manager exercises over the theatre. He regards himself as the principal factor in every piece in which he appears, and his choice of plays is thus restricted to such works as he finds suitable to his own individual peculiarities, or to such as his ambition (which is only a polite term for vanity) urges him to produce. Reversing the proper process, the common practice is

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now for an actor to adapt a play to himself instead of adapting himself to the play. The actor-manager, in nine cases out of ten, simply sits for his portrait. The actor who is his own manager is in a position to dictate terms, and the dramatist must accept his fate. Thus the elevation of the actor often means the degradation of the drama, for the dramatist is no longer free to follow his own inclinations, but must write, in nine cases out of ten, with an understanding of the aspirations and limitations of an actor-manager. If *Othello* had been written in these days, the character of Iago would probably have been "cut down," and Desdemona would have been smothered "off," not only because the actress engaged might not be "strong" enough for the character, but in order to allow the Othello to die, *solus*, in the centre of the stage.

Sometimes a temerarious author may dispute an actor-manager's right to tamper with his work, but the dramatist, whose artistic vision does not prevent him always from keeping one eye on the Bankruptcy Court, is more complaisant. Cases could be easily multiplied of dramatists who have with-

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drawn their plays from certain theatres because they refused to comply with the conditions imposed by the manager in his infinite vanity. One has been known to have refused to make the character chosen by the manager for his own the central figure of all the chief scenes. It was pointed out that this could not be done with dramatic propriety. "That may be," says the manager, "but the public, you must know, come to see *me*." Another manager, in rejecting a play in which there was not a character for himself of disproportionate importance, offered to reconsider his decision if the author would make the leading actor's part more important, as might easily be done, he suggested, by transferring certain of the heroine's speeches to the hero. A third declined a play in which there was too much of the heroine with the ingenuous remarks, "Where do *I* come in? I don't intend to produce plays with any woman in the leading part." In short, if some disinterested manager cannot be induced to change this policy, the heroine's diminished head will presently disappear altogether from the drama. Where, indeed, are the actresses? Who are

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they, and what is to be said of them? It is not at our leading theatres that one must look for them. Actresses of talent there may be ; actresses of talent there are, but it is not always to the talented that the first place in the London theatres is given. Mediocrity is so much favoured that the public is already accustomed to accept indifferent acting for the best. It is when some theatrical celebrity comes to us from abroad, or when our own players essay some part out of the ordinary, that their deficiencies are realized. It is not even necessary to look abroad. The appearance in London of such finished actresses as Mrs. Kendal or Miss Marion Terry, or the occasional glimpse we get of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, serves to show how much the standard of acting has fallen below the method of the two perfect actresses I have named, or the manifest, if not plenary, inspiration of the other.

All this is not only very bad for art ; it is, also, as the managers will discover one of these days, bad for business, for the public will presently tire of the one-part play, which is the form specially favoured by the managers

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who have added to the management of the theatre the control of the dramatist. Plays are written under the immediate eye of the actor-author-manager, and I know of more instances than one in which an actor, in the exercise of his prerogative, has had scenes written in, by other hands, for himself. For the artistic form of a play is the last concern of a theatrical manager, whose literary discernment, as a rule, is not more acute than the mean intelligence of the audience.

The manager of one of the leading theatres in London, who bought a play out-and-out for twenty pounds from a poor author, because he found in it one striking scene, in which he saw himself very large, actually handed the manuscript of the play over to a dramatist of established reputation, with a request that he should introduce the scene into a play he was engaged in writing for that particular manager. The dramatist protested, and the manager was amazed to find that objections to such a course were not overcome by his statement, with regard to the other play, that he had "paid for it." It may be confidently asserted that an author of the standing of Mr.

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H. A. Jones, who is everlastingly proclaiming to the world his high artistic ideals, would not submit to the arbitrary directions of an actor-author-manager. Yet Mr. Jones may have been quite unconsciously affected by the "spirit of the times,"—with which he shows, not infrequently, an excessive eagerness to reconcile his work—when he wrote *The Rogue's Comedy*, in which the character played by the actor-manager who produced the piece was elaborated out of all proportion to the remainder of the persons of the drama. Again in *Rosemary*, the monologue, which has no reference to the issue of the story, though it is described as the fourth act, might as well have been lopped off altogether; and I do not think that any manager, who was not also an actor, could believe that the dramatic interest of a whole act could be sustained by one solitary character. The authors of *Rosemary* may have written their play independently, but they have proved, at least, that they are not less conciliable to the present conditions of writing for the stage than those dramatists who receive their instructions directly from the author-actor-manager.

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The autocrat of the theatre, however, has his master in the public. England is a free country, the public may stay away from the theatre if they do not like the play. They do. Under the present system, the actor is doing all he can to impoverish the stage, and it is only his lack of discrimination that has turned the public favour to so great an extent already towards a purely frivolous form of entertainment, in which the interest at least is impartially distributed among a number of more or less amusing people. For the drift of the drama is towards "musical comedy," in which those who are not easily disgusted may find entertainment at the theatre—leaving their intellects outside with their umbrellas, as Lord Chesterfield says he did when he went to the Italian Opera.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ACTOR JUDGED BY HIMSELF.

THE unkindest critics of the theatrical profession are to be found among the actors themselves. Walter Bagehot used to say that the cure for admiring the House of Lords was to go and look at them. The cure for adulating the theatrical profession is to see theatrical life as it is lived ; not in the glamour of the footlights ; not in their private lives—which are, like other men's and women's, what they choose to make them—but among actors in the pursuit of their calling.

For an actor, engaged at a popular London theatre, the work is not exhausting. ~~Apart from the business of rehearsals, which do not come very often for an actor who plays the same part for months and months together, he is engaged for about three hours~~

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a day, leaving out of account the intervals between his exits and his entrances—which are nothing to speak of, when he happens to be his own manager—and the entr'actes. For this I take the liberty of thinking he is exceedingly well paid at a salary ranging from five or six to thirty or forty pounds a week, or even more, though the salaries of some actors, like the stakes of the whist-players who played “the usual game—guinea points and sixpence ready money,” are not paid always in pounds sterling. An actor, for his credit's sake, may stipulate that it shall be pretended by the manager that he receives a considerably larger salary than he draws from the treasury. This pleases him—and annoys his rivals. But it is not only the great actor who receives the great salary, for the favourite of the *petit théâtre* is not less generously paid. Arthur Roberts, for instance, earns a handsomer income than a Judge of the Supreme Court. The salary list at Daly's Theatre or the Gaiety is heavier, perhaps, than at any other theatre in the world; and—such are the surprises of theatrical life—a young lady who has only

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twenty-five shillings a week (and a brougham) may find herself, by a stroke of fortune, in management before she knows where she is.

With so much leisure, it may be imagined that the actor has plenty of time to devote to the cultivation of intellectual graces not exclusively of his own art ; for acting is an art which cannot be practised under the conditions favourable to production in any other art. It is strange to think that the artistic energy represented by the whole theatrical profession must be utterly repressed except at appointed hours. The actor, away from the stage, must be content to remain "mute," like the "inglorious" Milton of the poet's fancy—who might be "inglorious," but would never be "mute," though he might be unheard. The "study" of his parts makes no great call upon the time of the popular actor. His intellectual labours, as a rule, begin and end with his performance, though, he exercises his mind, from time to time, in congenial literary work by writing his own biography. Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Mary Anderson, J. L. Toole, the Bancrofts, Arthur Roberts, Penley, Albert Chevalier,

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Dan Leno, George Grossmith—who writes himself down “A Society Clown”—they have all written their recollections, or had them written for them; and it is generally much the same story: programmes and panegyrics. It is not in these books that one discovers the vast importance of the actor’s art. In all the Lives of the Players I know not any one which may stimulate a high ambition as the Lives of great men may do, or may serve as a noble example to the actor’s countrymen. The actor shines in a world of his own. A proposal was brought before the Assemblée Nationale in 1789 to exempt actors from certain privileges of citizenship, but it was decreed that no man should be excluded from public employment by reason of his profession. In the course of a hundred years, however, the administration in France has not received many recruits from the theatre. What are the public services of the actor to this country? Mr. Edward Terry—to his honour, and to the credit of his calling, be it said—takes an active part in the local affairs of his own parish. Lady Bancroft and Miss

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Florence St. John are zealous members of the Primrose League.

When dramatists speak of the hebetude of actors, they may be suspected of prejudice, and the failure of many bad plays, no doubt, is attributed by their authors to the actors' lack of comprehension. Yet nobody who has ever endured the fatiguing experience of a rehearsal can have been impressed by the general intelligence of the company taking part in it. Not a few of them seem incapable of thinking for themselves, whilst others think of themselves, and of nobody else in the piece. Only in rare instances does the actor consider his own part in relation to the whole play; and the story of the tragedian who knew *Hamlet* with everything but the Prince of Denmark left out, and followed the play only by his cues, is probably no invention. Actors do not read. They do not even read books connected with their own calling.* Munden, the great comedian, said of himself that he "never read any book but a play,

* "Actors do not buy books connected with their profession, even if they buy books at all."—*Athenæum*, July 23rd, 1898.

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and no play but one in which I myself acted, and no portion of that play but my own scenes." When this was repeated to Charles Lamb, he said, "I knew Munden well, and I believe him." Mrs. Pritchard, "the greatest of all the Lady Macbeths," assured a gentleman, with whom she supped after playing the part, that she had never read the whole play. Johnson, who confirms this story independently, says that "she no more thought of the play out of which her part was taken, than a shoemaker thinks of the skin out of which the piece of leather of which he is making a pair of shoes is cut." Kemble was a "poor creature," according to Tom Moore, "when he put pen to paper or otherwise had to bring out anything of mind." In our own day, we hear a great deal about the "intellectual" attainments of our actors, but although their sayings and doings are freely reported in all sorts of newspapers, it cannot be pretended that they contribute anything to the wit or wisdom of the age. The ordinary playgoer can have no idea how much the composition of the beautiful pictures presented on the stage is the work, not

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of the actors, but of the stage-manager (to say nothing of the scene-painter and the stage-carpenter) who may be an actor with a particular talent for this practical work—amounting in the superlative degree, as in the case of Henry Irving, to a positive genius for the management of the stage—or to a dramatist endowed with illimitable patience.

The performers taking part in a piece by Mr. W. S. Gilbert or Mr. Pinero may be said to be trained by the author not only to speak his words, but almost every movement is directed by the dramatist, in whose hands the players become as marionettes. That is why these authors always get their words spoken on the stage with a stricter adherence to the text than most authors can command—or, to be just, deserve. It is not that the actors are specially endowed for the occasion with a nice literary sense. Edward Righton, as experienced a comedian as any in his own day, spoke with knowledge on this point; and a few words from an article contributed by that excellent actor to a monthly magazine* may be quoted per-

* *The Theatre*, August, 1896.

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tinently as illustrating the character of the actor in many aspects. "I had the honour of stage-managing the original production of *The Happy Land* at the Court Theatre," says Mr. Righton, "if, indeed, he can be called stage-manager who is entirely guided by the wishes of the author." The success of Mr. Gilbert's piece should have convinced Mr. Righton of the wisdom of being guided by the wishes of the author. Conceive, if you can, what might have happened if the actors had been left to make what they pleased of a piece, which, on Mr. Righton's own confession, they were unable to understand. "When *The Happy Land* was read to the artists"—I am still quoting Mr. Righton's words—"few, if any of us, I am afraid, saw its real point. . . . Nobody is more ready for a genuine guffaw than an actor when he sees the gist of a joke, and I think the harshest thing that could be said of our want of penetration on that occasion was that we were none of us posted up in the politics of the day." We can find nothing harsher to say than that the author did not overrate the intelligence of the public in assuming

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them to be better informed than the actors. It is Mr. Righton who suggests, if I do not misunderstand him, that the actor does not share the common interest in public affairs. Can it be that the actor does not read the newspapers—the columns devoted to theatrical affairs always excepted? He does not think, he acts—if a “distinguished” actress, as distinction now goes, may be allowed to speak for her calling with authority, and if her interviewer does not belie her. His sympathetic description of her “charming room, all of white and a faint delicate green,” and of the “sweet earnestness” of the “distinguished actress” does not indicate an unamiable design on the part of the interviewer, to whom the “distinguished actress” is reported to have said, “I believe I have an aptitude for acting, but I can’t take pains. I never give anything an instant’s thought ; I never did, and never can.” Yet this has not prevented her from becoming a “distinguished” actress. There is a shorter cut, as well as a longer way round. The story of the *début* of another distinguished actress, Mrs. Langtry, an event in which Mrs. Bancroft took a

kindly and active interest, shows frankly how considerations, other than artistic, may influence the fortunes of the stage. "The extraordinary career of popularity which had been Mrs. Langtry's lot for several seasons," says Mrs. Bancroft,* who is here only referring to Mrs. Langtry's successes in society, "must have destroyed all fear of complete failure, for the ordeal of 'facing the public' had already been gracefully passed through." A belief in Mrs. Langtry's talents—a belief to which expression is given in very generous terms—may have induced Mrs. Bancroft to offer the beautiful novice the hospitality of the Haymarket Theatre. But Mrs. Bancroft certainly leads us to imagine that although "all sections of society fought for places, and lamentations were loud in many high quarters when non-success followed every effort to procure them," it was not alone the pure love of art which attracted the public, high and low, to the theatre. Here, then, is an art in which a position may be obtained by a good deal less exacting application than in

* "Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft On and Off the Stage." By Themselves. (Bentley.)

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any other. The emoluments are greater ; and it receives more liberal patronage, and more public consideration. Mr. H. B. Irving, a student at the Bar, passes from the Temple to the theatre and becomes at once in his new profession a person of more public concern than the most renowned advocate. His marriage with a young actress, whose name was unknown in London twelve months before, is reported at great length in the newspapers, in which we read how the bride, a glass of champagne in her hand, drank to the crowd gathered outside the house. The newspapers—to say nothing of the crowd—could not have made more of the marriage of a hero who had covered himself and his country with glory.

It is not only the newspapers and the crowd who have given to the actor a place of importance ridiculously out of proportion to his consequence in our national life. The recognition that acting has received, above all the arts, in the highest quarters, has directed more public attention to the actors, apart from their work, than they deserve. When the members of the theatrical profession pre-

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sented to the Prince of Wales, on his fiftieth birthday, a gift of a gold cigar-box, they acknowledged their indebtedness to His Royal Highness for the increased respect extended to their calling ; and the liberal patronage of the Prince of Wales, hardly less than the improvement in their material circumstances, has helped, no doubt, to influence the public mind. They owe it to a good friend at Court that they may now boast that they have had the honour not only of entertaining, but of being entertained by, their Sovereign, and that they have mixed with the salt of the earth at a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace—Sir Henry Irving, and Ellen Terry, Lady Bancroft, and one or two more, whose careers have done so much to please and to edify the public. It is because Acting is so signally favoured that it is considered above all the arts by those who attach most value to such honours ; and it is because such value is attached to these honours that one regrets that the recognition of artistic distinction by the state is not less impartial. To think that if the representatives of all the Arts were met

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together, Sir Henry Irving would take precedence of Mr. Ruskin, and Mr. Kipling come after Sir Squire Bancroft !

But this great respect for the theatrical profession is not often shared by the members of the profession themselves. The petty jealousies, the mean intrigues, and the unworthy rivalries, are perhaps inevitable in a profession in which personal advantage is everything. A standard of manners and of morals—a professional etiquette—can hardly be maintained, but it should not be difficult for the theatrical profession as a body to add to its dignity in the eyes of the public. The feeling that it should do so exists among the actors themselves. Speaking of the scheme for an Actors' Hospital, Mr. Wilson Barrett (who feels the indignity of constantly appealing to the public for "alms" in the name of his profession) is reported to have said : "There is too much of this fashion of appealing to the public. It lowers the profession in the eyes of the public. We are not all impecunious ; we are not always out of work ; and it belittles the profession to be thus continually asking alms—that, I am afraid, is the only word—

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of the public. All these appeals to the public redound most fatally upon the standing and dignity of the profession. I am constrained to say this, because the evil is growing to too great lengths." By the most contemptuous enemy, the calling which has done so much to brighten our idle hours, could not be judged more harshly than it is judged by itself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PASSION FOR PUBLICITY.

THE common failing of the actor—the passion for talking of himself in private and in public—marks at once the limit of his interests and the illimitability of his self-esteem. Such is the craving for advertisement that some managers now employ a person whose sole duty it is to avail himself of every opportunity of communicating to the newspapers whenever the name of the manager can be made the subject of an insidious paragraph. Even the fact that an actor is not acting, that he is taking a holiday, is supposed to be a matter of interest to the public, who are permitted to know exactly where he may be found. When the manager travels in America, the trumpeter goes in the suite, and the name of the actor is diligently kept in the public mind during

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his absence, and London is informed of his triumphs. His failures are recorded only in the American press. For it is not every English actor who takes the American cities by storm, as Sir Henry Irving has done. I could mention the names of comedians, as popular as any in this country, who have found their enthusiastic audiences in the United States only at the supper-tables of the Bohemian Clubs.

Not every manager is content to have a hired trumpeter to blow his praises. Yet the managers themselves are but poor performers upon the instrument. Even Sir Henry Irving, who needs the service of no trumpeter, for the playgoer readily volunteers for the work—and one volunteer is worth a dozen pressmen, if I may give a new sense to the old proverb—even Sir Henry Irving, when he blows his own trumpet, is not much of a player. It is a character in which he is not a success.

In mentioning the name of Henry Irving, it is the usual thing to refer to the popular actor's "scholarship," for the term has now acquired a new use in the service of the

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stage. It may be that the famous actor has devoted himself to learning and study apart from the business of the theatre ; but in none of the numerous biographies of Irving do I find any evidence of his erudition.

Nor do I remember that Sir Henry Irving has ever advanced such pretensions on his own account. In a lecture delivered at Oxford, at the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor, the actor modestly and graciously disclaimed any such title to address such an audience. "The only Alma Mater I ever knew," said the actor, "was the hard stage of a country theatre"—and a better mother than the hard stage of a country theatre no great actor ever had. The impulse, which directs the mind of a man towards the theatre, I imagine is not exactly that of the scholar. Scholarship is not essential to an actor. A man may become a good actor, even a great actor, without it. A great actor may be no scholar, just as a great scholar may be no actor. Sir Henry Irving, to be sure, is not the only actor in these days who is said to be "scholarly." As a complimentary term, "scholar" is now as commonly applied to actors as the word "artist."

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But Irving is not simply said to be the finest actor, he is likewise the ripest scholar of them all. Certainly it is not to dialectics that he has directed his studies, and I find once more, in an interview with Sir Henry Irving * on the eve of a Shakesperian revival at the Lyceum, a witness in the very head of the theatrical profession, to prove how little an actor may grace his cause in speaking of himself.

Sir Henry Irving objects to the charge that too much consideration has been given to the question of scenery at the Lyceum Theatre under his management. He has not given too much consideration to the matter to please the public; and if he gave less, he would probably not find Shakespere the good friend he has been to the Lyceum. Sir Henry Irving protests, with the air of a spendthrift defending himself, that the "production" of *Hamlet*, in which he appeared for two hundred nights, cost only one hundred pounds. But that was many years ago. I should like to see him do it now. Times have changed, and nobody, I believe,

* *Daily Chronicle*, September 19th, 1895.

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has done more than Sir Henry Irving himself to effect that change. "The scenic art has never been deliberately made the cardinal element of my policy," says the late manager of the Lyceum. If not the "cardinal element" of Sir Henry Irving's policy, it has become little less at other theatres, where the splendours of *mise-en-scène* are matched against lesser actors. I believe people nowadays go to see the scenery at certain theatres as they used to go to see the acting. Still nobody can say that Irving has ever done the thing in a miserly way. The price paid for the silk for Ellen Terry to wear in *Cymbeline* was quoted in the newspapers just before the production of the piece, and I remember it was a sensational figure, though I daresay something from Shoolbred's at half the price would have done very well. But Sir Henry Irving is not the man to spoil the ship for the sake of a thousand pounds' worth of tar. I remember reading of a wonderful peal of bells made expressly for the Lyceum *Faust*—a piece which certainly impressed by its pictorial rather than by its literary beauties. Then there was the Cardinal's robe in *Henry VIII.*,

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which Sir Henry Irving was said to have had made at Lyons, in order to obtain the exact pink worn by the cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. Had it been rose-pink or scarlet it would have been all the same to most people, but not to Irving. "When you are getting into the skin of a character," he says, "you need not neglect his wardrobe." The actor who blacked himself all over to play Othello was not more scrupulous. But the effect of reproducing the wardrobe, and the effect of reproducing the character, are very different things. When we remember that cardinal's robe, we exclaim, with Mr. Squeers, "Here's richness!" And it is not the business of the actor to suggest such thoughts. Sir Henry Irving seems to me to misapprehend the idea of illusion, when he says, "The whole movement of stage organization is towards perfection in the art of illusion, which so far from distracting the attention of the playgoer from the acting, gives the performance greater verisimilitude, and more space to his imagination." The reverse is the case, I contend, with regard to the latter part of his

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argument. "The whole movement of stage organization is towards perfection in the art of illusion"—assuming the art of illusion to mean mere realism in the *mise-en-scène*. That is "the whole movement of stage organization," sure enough ; and a very sorry thing it is for the stage that it should be so, for this "power of illusion" is gradually ousting that other power of illusion which is called acting. It is not alone the dramatist and the actor who make the success of a play in these days, but the scene-painter and the stage-carpenter and the costumier have a considerable share in the successes of the theatre. If I may trust my memory, Sir Henry Irving himself, on the first night of *Cymbeline*, expressed his own sense of heavy obligation to the artist who had designed the dresses and superintended the *mise-en-scène*. Elaborate scenery, I can assure Sir Henry Irving, does distract the attention of the playgoer from the acting, and I confess that I have often regretted that I have not found more time to examine the composition of the beautiful pictures of the Lyceum stage to which my attention has sometimes strayed

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from the acting. Yet beautiful as these pictures are in themselves, I deny that they "give the performance greater verisimilitude, and more space to the imagination." Exactly the contrary is the case. They leave nothing whatever to the imagination. Real fruit hanging from a stage tree is real fruit, and there is no imagination about it; and so far as "verisimilitude" goes, I declare that acting never seems more artificial than when everything else is perfectly life-like. Good plays do not grow on trees. A manager cannot pick them, like apples, even if he could distinguish the good from the bad. It is "significant of much," as the sage says, that the sensitive man of letters disdains to write for the theatre. Robert Louis Stevenson gives utterance to this feeling when he says: "No, I will not write a play for Irving nor for the devil. Can you not see that the work of falsification which a play demands is of all tasks the most ungrateful?"*

Differences of opinion may reasonably exist with regard to Sir Henry Irving as an actor. There is no absolute standard of

* *Vailima Letters*. (Methuen, 1896.)

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acting, and as every eye forms its own beauty, and as a woman may possess charms for one man which another may not see, so acting, which depends so much upon personal attraction, is to a great extent a matter of taste. But two opinions cannot exist with regard to Irving's genius for the management and decoration of the stage ; and when he is not angry at being reminded that it is in this that he is supreme, he is rather proud to acknowledge it ; for he tells his interviewer that " the manager of the Comédie Française paid me the compliment of using in *Le Juif Polonais* certain stage effects of *The Bells*." I have no desire to spoil the compliment, but it would be more to the point if Sir Henry Irving could have told his interviewer that the Comédie Française derived from the Lyceum certain effects of the acting. I can tell him that it did not. M. Coquelin, indeed, entirely differed from Irving in his conception of the leading character. Availing myself of the privilege I have claimed for the playgoer, I take the liberty of finding Irving's melodramatic Mathias very much more interesting and stimulating than the

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famous French actor's sullen performance of the same part.

Again I join issue with Sir Henry Irving upon the subject of the actor-manager. "Actor-managers, at all events, have made sacrifices for their calling," he says, "and protected its interests ; and it will be an evil day for those interests when they are left to the mercy of speculation." When Benedick said he would die a bachelor, he did not think he should live to be married. Sir Henry Irving has lived to hand over his theatre to a limited liability company, and a limited liability company may be not unreasonably as anxious as any actor-manager to avert "the evil day." But what are the sacrifices the actor-managers have made for their calling? And in what manner are those interests likely to be jeopardised when the theatres are no longer under the control of actors. What has the stage to expect from the mercy of the actor-manager that it cannot expect from "the mercy of speculation"? The real interests of the stage are not likely to suffer from the control of theatres by directors, with no individual preference, whose sole intent is to please the public.

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Sir Henry Irving himself does not pretend that the Lyceum Theatre has been conducted on the lines which he conceives for the ideal theatre. "It is idle to expect private enterprise to discharge the obligations of a public subsidy," says Sir Henry Irving. A public subsidy, then, would enable us to see the plays which are either too good or too bad—which is it?—for the Lyceum. This National Theatre is, apparently, not to be a popular playhouse, but a theatre with aims which are beyond the reach of the "independent manager," however lofty the professions of the "independent manager" may be. Does this demand for a National Theatre imply that the stage has not yet reached the summit of dignity, that there is still something to be done—which can only be done at the public expense—to elevate the Drama? Either it means that, or it means nothing.

I am for leaving the drama to private enterprise; not merely because I believe the theatrical managers themselves would be the first to cry out against the competition of a subsidised theatre, but because the public may very well be left to choose, and to pay

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for, their own amusements. When the public grow tired of costly productions, Sir Henry Irving will, no doubt, be ready to spend his hundred pounds upon a revival of *Hamlet*. Until then, he will wisely continue to spend thousands. It would be ungrateful and unjust to pretend that Sir Henry Irving's great Shakesperian revivals have been a mere success of *mise-en-scène*, but of how many recent Shakesperian productions by other managers can it be said that the acting has been the major attraction? Sir Henry Irving shall not forfeit our favour because he has adapted *Cymbeline* to the conditions of the stage in our time, for nobody but a fanatic could wish to see Shakespere's plays on the stage in the exact shape and form in which they were written. We make no demand for the play as it was written, when Shakespere is represented on the stage, and attention is not exclusively concentrated upon the lines of the poet. I am ready to maintain that Sir Henry Irving, in his own arrangement of *Cymbeline*, has shown greater cunning in theatrical effect—as the conventions of the scene go nowadays—than Shakespere him-

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self. We would rather not have Shakespere's plays on the stage at all than have them in the form in which they are familiar only to the student. For the plays of Shakespere belong to literature, not to the stage, and I do not believe that they could, on their merits alone, draw any larger audience to the Lyceum than the burlesques of Aristophanes would attract to the Gaiety.

Still I do not absolutely approve of the tinkering of the text of Shakespere's plays. Notwithstanding Sir Henry Irving's taste and scholarship, his arrangement of *Cymbeline*, for instance, may sometimes offend the critical. The part of Postumus, Cymbeline, or Cloten, may be "cut" to bring into prominence the character of Iachimo ; but I can see no excuse for cutting short the beautiful dirge. It may be that hardly anybody—at most, not more than one in a thousand of the audience—will have missed the antiphonal third verse, which was left out at the Lyceum ; but that one in a thousand would rather have the thing cut out altogether than spoiled in this fashion. This is editing Shakespere with a vengeance.

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Sir Henry Irving, we all know, has his own ideas about Shakespere. His contributions to the endless discussions respecting the poet's intentions have not added much to the common stock of knowledge. The originality of certain views he has made public must be acknowledged, but they are not, I submit, the views of the scholar versed in Shakesperean lore. It is now some years since the manager of the Lyceum, on the strength, presumably, of a reputation, not merely as an actor, but as a Shakesperean scholar, published in a literary review certain "Notes" on the great poet, which enjoyed a singular immunity from criticism in the newspapers. The whole affair is now forgotten, no doubt, by the world at large, if ever it took any heed of it ; to the student of Shakespere it remains still a memory, and I recall it now only by way of establishing my point that an actor may deservedly acquire a reputation for himself, as Sir Henry Irving has done, by playing Shakespere, and yet have no special knowledge of the facts of literary history. Writing upon the subject of "The Third Murderer in *Macbeth*,"* the accomplished actor constructed

* *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1877.

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a theory of his own by which the utterly insignificant characters of the Third Murderer and a certain "attendant" were mysteriously connected. If "my theory," so gravely announced, had been founded upon any reasonable assumption, the discussion of it would still have been mere futility. It would have been about as much use to discuss the colour of the hair or the parentage of a character with but one line to speak in the play. But "my theory" was founded upon an error, supposed to be drawn from Shakespeare's "own" stage directions, which were not Shakespeare's at all, as the writer might have seen for himself by reference to the authoritative folio of 1623. The actor may be forgiven—more easily, perhaps, than the editor who offered the hospitality of his magazine to this story of a cock and a bull. Yet Sir Henry Irving has edited Shakespeare's works.* There was no reason why he should do so. But it is not enough for the ambitious actor in these days that he gets both praise and pudding, it is not enough for him that his calling is admitted to rank with the liberal professions and the fine arts. Even the poor

* The "Henry Irving" *Shakespeare*. (Cassell.)

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scholar must share his oatmeal with the actor.

The theatre "is too much with us." If the private life of the actors is now freely discussed, it is not because they have shown any very remarkable anxiety to discourage the curiosity of the public. Their dresses, their diversions, their opinions are the subject of a hundred fatuous paragraphs in the newspapers. More is written about their personal affairs than about their acting. It sometimes seems as if everything in the world, from cosmetics to the "best books," were to be considered with special reference to the theatre.

There is a story of a litigious person who slipped over a grating in the street, and injured his leg. "Run for a doctor," said one of the crowd. "No, don't send for a doctor; send for a lawyer," said the injured man, with an eye to an advantage. "Send for a newspaper reporter," would be the first thought of an actor in like circumstances. Whether this passion for publicity is founded upon self-admiration or the value of an advertisement, one or the other, or both, it is the rule

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of his existence not to fail to communicate to the Press on every possible occasion; and with an actor, in Napoleon's phrase, "il n'y a rien d'impossible." A lovely young actress is run away with—by a horse, let us say—and the papers are at once informed of the affair, which takes place, as a general rule, in the King's Road, Brighton, where runaway horses are invariably stopped in time to allow their riders to appear the next night in the part in which they have "made such a great success." I have read many times of such an accident, but I do not remember that it ever prevented an actress from fulfilling her engagement at the theatre, for the lady invariably escapes with a purely figurative upset—and a paragraph in the newspapers. That story, indeed, is nowadays somewhat discredited, like the stories of actresses and their lost jewels. The thieves who steal the jewels of an actress are never captured to my knowledge. Now in these days, it is not necessary for actors and actresses to do anything to distinguish themselves—not even in acting—to attract the attention of the newspapers. Yet it is not so very long since

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a famous editor of the *Times* declined to publish a letter from Macready, as the *Times* could not be expected to notice communications from an actor. *Tempora mutantur.*

Time was when the actor might fall over a crevasse in Switzerland or might rescue a boy at Margate from drowning—"his custom always of an afternoon," as one might say—and a few lines would be all the notice these brave deeds received from the newspapers. Nowadays the actor gets a whole column where he would have had a paragraph at most. A column! A full page, with illustrations, is his for the asking. He has not even to ask for it. Sir Henry Irving, who may well remember the days when the actors were more or less disdained by the newspapers, has lived to be able to administer publicly, from the stage of his theatre, a rebuff to the pushing journalists who importune him for news beyond that which is forwarded to the press in official communications from the theatre.

One might imagine that they get all the publicity they want, without asking. But it is not so. The actor's craving for publicity is still insatiable. When an actor protests publicly against what he calls bluntly "uncritical

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adulation,"* and expresses the opinion that actors are too much praised, we may hope that the inevitable ebb of the tide is not so very far off. "Uncritical adulation" has certainly made actors "the most popular persons in the realm—with the single exception of professional jockeys," as the late Sir Frank Lockwood put it, unkindly enough, to an audience of actors and their uncritical adulators.† Where is the distinction, when every actor is "distinguished" as every member of Parliament is an "honourable gentleman."

I have before me, as I write, a little book of elegant extracts, picked up at an office of the District Messengers, where it lay for gratuitous distribution. It shows exactly how much an actor has to put up with. This little book, which is published, presumably without the sanction of the management, is a volume of criticism, obviously intended to recommend to the public a performance of

* Speech by Charles Wyndham at the dinner of the Actors' Benevolent Fund. *Daily News'* report, November 21st, 1896.

† Speech by Sir Frank Lockwood on the same occasion.

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a favourite comedian—"uncritical adulation," in effect, for it consists mainly of favourable comments extracted from the opinions of the several newspapers, not invariably of the highest authority. The book might lead the unsophisticated to suspect the critics of "uncritical adulation," for it resembles nothing in the world so much as the pamphlets in which the manifold virtues of this or that specific are extolled. Now, the actor mentioned is, within limitations, a very fine actor ; as a light comedian, he has not to this day a rival among the younger members of his profession. One may even allow his "unparalleled vivacity" and his "unsurpassed brilliancy"; the "marvellous truth" of his acting (at moments, at least) may also be admitted. Myself, I should prefer to say that the actor was unsurpassed rather than "unsurpassable." But surely the critic overdoes it who writes of the comedian in this strain : "As played at this theatre, the performance is one of the most human, real, pathetic, and natural that the playgoer of the present or past has seen. I speak by the card." This sort of thing, in which the reader specially interested in the

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theatre will recognize at once the intemperate style of a writer who speaks not so much by the card as by the yard ; this sort of thing, I apprehend, is the only kind of criticism to which a modest actor may object. Not all the critics have offended our popular comedians in this fashion.

But it is not the critics who are to blame for the ridiculous prominence given to the actor. The actors have gone behind the critics, and it is rather the friendly editors, and the indiscreet reporters, and the pestilent gossips, who are less intimately acquainted with the actor's work, and less capable of forming a just opinion of it, who have done the mischief between them. For a mischief it is that the stage receives so much attention outside the bounds of regular criticism, to the detriment of worthier things—that a newspaper like the *Daily Telegraph*, which lends its authority readily to a project for "raising a monument to perpetuate the memory of so good and great a man as the lamented Sir Augustus Harris," can spare no more than twenty-nine lines for recording the death of Coventry Patmore. Without exaggerating

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the authority of the *Daily Telegraph*, the attention, out of all proportion to its importance in our national life, which it gives to the theatre, impresses the ignorant, and so exercises an influence by no means elevating on public taste and manners.

And it is not only upon the vulgar—the vulgar rich especially—that the newspapers have imposed an exaggerated respect for the actor and his calling. The misplaced favour with which Benjamin Jowett regarded the stage has certainly not brought much good to Oxford. The number of young gentlemen more eager to distinguish themselves in the theatre than in the schools has increased. I remember that a burlesque, in which a character appeared made up exactly in the figure of the late Professor Jowett—robes and all—was produced, so to say, under his very eyes, at the Oxford theatre, with a couple of members of the University among the performers.

The liberal patronage of the stage is not likely to increase the respect for scholarship among the impressionable youth at the seats of learning. At Cambridge this year neither the Porson Prize nor Sir William Brown's

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medal was awarded, and it fared with English verse as with Greek and Latin, for it was the same again with the Chancellor's Prize. Political Economy, too, has, by latest advices, been banished to Mars, for there were no candidates for the special examination on this subject for the B.A. degree. No essays were sent in for the Burney Prize, and the Members' Prize for a Latin essay was not awarded. But the theatrical season, I believe, has been a great success.

The actor, it may be, does not believe his calling is everything his uncritical adulators tell him it is. Perhaps he only acts the part of believing it. But with Sir Henry Irving, the theatre is the temple of all the arts, just as with the engineer, rivers were created for the purpose of feeding navigable canals. At a meeting held at the Lyceum Theatre,* for the purpose of presenting Charles Wyndham with a testimonial from the members of his own calling, as an acknowledgment of a handsome donation towards the Actors' Benevolent Fund, Sir Henry Irving is reported to have regretted that the meeting

* November 17th, 1896.

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“ had not been made a public one, for he was sure the public would have wished to testify to him by their presence their heartfelt appreciation of his charity and brotherly love.” When it is remembered that Mr. Wyndham’s gift was made to a fund intended solely for the benefit of the members of his own calling, it may seem that Sir Henry Irving misinterprets the general feeling in thinking that Mr. Wyndham was performing a public service for which he was entitled to public thanks. Indeed, the public feeling, I should say, is that actors should support more regularly their own charities, instead of appealing, as they do persistently, to the public at large for contributions. Mr. Wyndham, perhaps, had some such thought in his mind when he replied majestically, “ Just as the sun repays to the earth in mist and vapour what it has taken from it in rivers and streams, so, when a man contributes to the resources of his calling, he is only giving back in one form what he has taken from it in another.” One is tempted, even in reading these remarks, to cry “ Bravo ! ” and clap one’s hands. Is it not of the theatre ? The words seem to take the stage.

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That the newspapers should be invited to report such proceedings is not so surprising as it is that they should consider such proceedings worth reporting. What has it to do with the public? To put it plainly, what has the public to do with the private affairs of an actor any more than with those of any other man? When I read in the papers that an actor-manager has accepted an engagement to direct private theatricals at the Marquis of Tomnoddy's, and will, therefore, not appear that evening at his Theatre, I am not so much impressed by the fact that the actor is going to Tomnoddy House for the evening as I am by the idea of his turning his back so coolly upon the public. When Edmund Kean was asked, "What did Lord Essex think of you?" he replied, "Damn Lord Essex! The pit rose at me." That is not the first thought of the fashionable actors of our times. With them it is, "Damn the pit. What does Lord —— think of me?" Surely, the publication of social tittle-tattle is not calculated to improve one's opinion of the actors. Whose interests are served by such announcements,

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which are communicated to the newspapers, I presume, not by the actors themselves? Can it be by the actor's aristocratic acquaintances?

The eagerness of the actor to direct attention to his public performances by all the means in his power, that I can understand. The mention of an actor's name in the newspaper in flattering connection with his work is as useful an advertisement as the posters on the hoardings, or the photographs in the shop-windows, grimacing at all the world. But the actor's name is a name to conjure with even beyond the sphere of influence of his own art! The trouble and the ingenuity and the money expended by actors in "keeping their names before the public," are not exceeded even by the pushing tradesmen, who show remarkable astuteness in associating their wares with names of actors. Thus "Sir Augustus Harris's Funeral" is turned to account by an enterprising firm of florists, who advertise in the newspapers, under this lugubrious heading, that they have "executed orders" for the "funeral gifts," among others, of numerous theatrical cele-

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brities whose names are advertised in the newspapers of the day. To the opinions of the members of the theatrical profession about everything, from Shakespere to soap, an exaggerated value seems to be attached. Is it conceivable that people should be the readier to physic themselves with the Royal Clarion Voice Pills because (to quote from the newspaper advertisement) a certain actor is represented to have said "they are excellent," and other well-known members of the theatrical profession, "and clergymen and barristers" (names not given) have written of these pills "in the highest terms of praise"? In all this there is surely something shocking to good sense and good manners, for which the actors are not alone to blame.

When we read in the papers how the actors are first to offer their contributions to a fund for presenting a testimonial (which was very properly declined) to the Ambassador of the United States at the Court of St. James's (through the medium of the sympathetic *Daily Telegraph*), something tells us that this is done in the name of Art; but when

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we find, sandwiched between the letters of two of our eminent actors, a similar communication, written under the style and title of a trading firm of solid reputation, we ask, in the name of pickles, What next? Again, when the same paper starts a testimonial to a cricketer we may attribute the ready response of the theatrical profession—women, no less than men—to their interest in the game, to say nothing of their well-known generosity, which may always be counted upon, wherever the *Daily Telegraph* addresses an appeal to the great heart of the nation.

Their communications to the press are not always so disinterested. A paragraph appears in all the papers to the effect that "Mr. Charles Hawtrey is at present spending his time between the British Museum and the School of Electricity." But it is not for the pure love of science that Mr. Charles Hawtrey is spending his time between the British Museum and the School of Electricity. No one for a moment imagines it is. Mr. Charles Hawtrey is also spending some of his time, it would seem, at that particular point between the British Museum and the School of Electricity, which is occupied by the

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Comedy Theatre, for the paragraph proceeds to explain that this interesting information has reference to "the forthcoming production at the Comedy, wherein a mummy is resuscitated by the aid of electricity." Mr. Charles Hawtrey's scientific studies, or his polished acting, did not enable him to galvanize that mummy into life for long. This sort of paragraph finds its way more often into the waste-paper basket of a newspaper, I imagine, than into its columns. It may be quoted as an example of the least artistic form of puffery. Yet there are people simple enough to attach value to these things. "*Epater le bourgeois*," that is the motto of the theatrical manager.

At some of the leading theatres the management regularly prepares for the representatives of the press at a first performance a list of the distinguished people present. Advertisement, advertisement, advertisement. When a performance is given before the Queen—"a costly advertisement" which a great actor, in the early days of the reign, frankly expressed his desire to be without—the paragraphs, before and after the event, are usually followed by an announcement,

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sent broadcast to newspapers, that the manager has received a letter of thanks from Her Majesty. The story is told as if the manager had been singled out for some special honour, and those papers particularly interested in the theatre elaborate this formal theme with all kinds of variations. The old stager knows the story by heart. An amusing anecdote bearing upon this point is told of a late Private Secretary of the Queen. Whenever a performance was given before the Court, the next day the manager received from Sir Henry Ponsonby the usual telegram, in such invariable terms as these: "Her Majesty the Queen would be delighted to know that the members of your company are well, and that they have had an agreeable journey. Please convey to them the expression of my esteem." Sir Henry Ponsonby, who made no invidious distinctions, is known to have sent this message to the manager of a troupe of performing geese.

The system by which the actor keeps in touch with the metropolis when he travels in the country or abroad has been brought to such a degree of perfection that it is difficult to account for some of the reports which find

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their way into the papers from time to time. The pseudo-Prussian, Mr. Crummles, "could not for the life of him imagine how the newspapers found out the things they did." The old stock company is dead, but the soul, Vincent Crummles, still goes marching on. The newspaper paragraph, which Crummles "produced from the pocket of the pantaloons he wore in private life," might have been written yesterday:—"The talented Vincent Crummles, long favourably known to fame as a country manager and actor of no ordinary pretensions, is about to cross the Atlantic on a histrionic expedition. Crummles is to be accompanied, we hear, by his lady and gifted family. We know no man superior to Crummles in his particular line of character, or one who, whether as a public or private individual, could carry with him the best wishes of a larger circle of friends. Crummles is certain to succeed." One may go back to an earlier period, without losing sight of the parallel, to the case of Foote, who sent a copy of a farce to the Archbishop of Canterbury, with the request that his Grace would strike out anything he found objectionable in it. It is recorded that the Archbishop returned

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the play untouched, because he was sure that if he had put his pen to the manuscript, the actor would have advertised the play as corrected and prepared for the stage by his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is not the actors, but the clergy, who have changed.

Shakespeare himself has been quoted as the great encomiast of the actors.* A familiar passage from the poet has been accepted by Sir Henry Irving "as the charter of their liberties." Yet Hamlet's address to the players is not altogether flattering to the actors, who have not corrected, in three hundred years, the faults at which Shakespeare scoffed. The change is in the actor, not in his art. Shakespeare was himself an actor, and there is sufficient reason to believe that he was not a very distinguished actor. But he was speaking from intimate experience in his reflections on the subject of acting. Do they justify Sir Henry Irving's assertion that the poet "believed that to hold the mirror up to nature was one of the worthiest functions in the sphere of labour"? No. Far from considering acting as one of the worthiest

* *The Actor's Art.* By Sir Henry Irving.

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functions of labour, Shakespere has not dissembled his feelings, but has expressed himself, in unmistakable terms, in the contrary sense :—

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gor'd my own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear.

Sonnet cx.

For making himself " a motley to the view " ; for goring his own thoughts ; for selling cheap what is most dear, he distinctly claims, not admiration, but pity. In Sonnet cxi. he chides fortune,

That did no better means provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds,
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed.

Since Sir Henry Irving's argument has been heard, without protest ; since Shakespere's name has been brought into question, it is surely not untimely or unjust, to argue that the actors cannot claim the weight of such supreme authority for the honour their calling now enjoys. May it not be said, with better warrant, that the poet's judgment has been reversed upon appeal to posterity ?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACTOR'S BIBLE.

EVERY art, every profession, every trade, every religion, everything, everybody is represented in the newspaper press. Doctors, Butchers, Anarchists, Ritualists, Jews, Baptists, Dentists, Homœopathists, Stamp Collectors, Dressmakers, Fishmongers, Hairdressers, Undertakers, they have all their own journals specially dedicated to their particular interests; and there is not one among them from which the curious reader may not derive instruction and entertainment. The newspapers devoted to literature and the arts have naturally a more general interest. Since a place among the arts is claimed for Acting, it is instructive to turn to the pages of the bulky weekly newspaper which represents the theatrical profession in the press. In the

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pages of the *Era*, we may take it that the interests, artistic and professional, of the actor are sympathetically considered. In the theatrical profession, the paper is commonly known as "The Actor's Bible." This, I presume, is because the actor puts his faith in it. It is his favourite Sunday reading, and he reads it all the week; it is a newspaper that is well fingered in the theatrical clubs. The importance of the actor is certainly not underrated by the *Era*. The glory of his calling is asserted at every opportunity. Bob Acres does not insist more persistently upon his courage. The talents of the actors are recognized in such handsome terms, that the reader is amazed by the number of "distinguished" men and women in the profession. And yet there is nothing like the *Era* to convince one of the utter insignificance of the actor and his calling. A hostile witness, as the lawyers say, but a witness, all the same, to the truth.

Reading the *Era* is, for the ordinary person, like going behind the scenes. At the first glance, one is surprised that there is so much to be said every week about the arts of the

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theatre. After reading the paper, one is surprised that there is so little in it of any earthly interest—and one does not look for higher things in the “Actor’s Bible.” You may read it from end to end without carrying away one single useful thought. It is not for its wit that the actors read the *Era*, and a reader who is interested, not professionally, in the theatre, may even find it dull. To me, one number of the *Era* is very like another ; one page is like another page. It is the same thing over and over again. It is not the fault of the editor that it is so. As mere journalism, the paper is, indeed, a very creditable production ; the astonishing fact is that such a paper, however well done, should exercise the power and influence which the *Era* possesses unless we regard it solely as a “trade” paper. As such, it fulfils the purpose admirably of a medium for advertisement and intercommunication for the members of the theatrical profession. No opportunity is missed by the editor of asserting the artistic pretensions of the actors, and it is not his fault that the intellectual limitations of the actor’s art are such as they must appear to the

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occasional reader of the "Actor's Bible." A journal devoted to any of the arts is not interesting exclusively to those who follow art as a profession. It is not only by men of letters that the literary reviews are read ; but the art of the theatre, as it is freely and faithfully reflected in the *Era*, has no claim upon the cultivated reader's consideration. Criticisms of the plays and actors are given ; but this is *crambe repetita* ; and the opinions of the *Era* upon these matters have not more weight than those of other papers. To appraise, if not to praise, seems to be the intention. I can imagine a theatrical manager in any part of the country, looking to the paper to find out what a new play is about. Of its commercial value, I daresay, he may be able to form a good idea from the ample account given by the *Era* ; and it is only the London managers who pretend very solemnly to consider the artistic value of a play. I wonder sometimes whether these managers ever exchange views upon the subject with the spruce, business-like gentlemen who look after "the front of the house." For *their* minds, I am sure, are never vexed by thoughts of art.

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Criticism in the *Era*, however, is not all plot, names, and adjectives. Maybe the accounts of the progress of theatrical art throughout the country are not more entertaining to the ordinary reader than the market reports in the daily papers; but the *Era* can soar above this sort of thing. For instance:—"It is the work of a real genius and a dramatic artist of splendid originality. Nothing like it has been seen in London for years; it is an achievement of extraordinary ingenuity, of marvellous merit, of wonderful ability. We doubt if all the annals of stage history contain an account of a greater achievement than—" Than what? Who and what is it that is thus held up to the admiration and the envy of the whole profession? It is in such terms that the *Era* proclaims the "splendid," "extraordinary," "marvellous," "wonderful" genius of a quaint little thing who took the town by storm not long ago with a comic song, and subsequently appeared as a common domestic drudge in a farce of no consequence. It is Louie Freear's impersonation of the servant girl in *Oh, Susannah!* which leaves the *Era* in doubt

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if "all the annals of stage history contain an account of a greater achievement." This is an opinion expressed deliberately by a paper which addresses itself not to the public at large, but to the members of the profession, to which this little wonder is welcomed with such raptures.

We hear a great deal about the "honour" and "dignity" of the theatrical profession, but one has only to turn to the pages of the "Actor's Bible" for the truth about the stage, if not the whole truth; and it is from the actors themselves that we learn it. The theatrical profession appears to have been thrown into a fever of excitement by the opinions frankly expressed by Mr. Clement Scott concerning the stage as a calling.* Mr. Scott speaks from a life-long acquaintance with the theatre and with those who live by it. It may be said that it is not his business as a critic of the theatre to concern himself with the private lives of actors and actresses. That may be. It is, indeed, particularly ungracious of Mr. Scott, who has been admitted to their

* "Does the Stage make for good? A talk with Mr. Clement Scott." *Great Thoughts*, Jan. 1st, 1898.

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intimate acquaintance, to have spoken his mind so freely ; and the actors, not unreasonably, complain that this blow has been delivered by a man with whom they had lived on terms of friendship. All this, of course, strengthens their case against their critic, but does not weaken Mr. Scott's case against the theatre. Clearly, it would be difficult to find anybody better qualified than he to speak from knowledge of the subject.

“It is nearly impossible,” says Mr. Scott, “for a woman to remain pure who adopts the stage as a profession. Everything is against her. The freedom of life, of speech, of gesture, which is the rule behind the curtain, renders it almost impossible for a woman to preserve that simplicity of manner which is after all her greatest charm. The whole life is artificial and unnatural to the last degree, and, therefore, an unhealthy life to live. But there are far more serious evils to be encountered than these. These drawbacks are the things that render it impossible for a lady to remain a lady. But what is infinitely more to be deplored is that a woman who endeavours to keep her purity is almost of

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necessity foredoomed to failure in her career. It is an awful thing to say, and it is still more terrible that it is true, but no one who knows the life of the green-room will dare deny it. More I need not say ; I could give chapter and verse for my authority by the dozen, but it would avail no good purpose, and, indeed, it would not be very savoury reading. All I can say is, that I marvel at any mother who allows her daughter to take up the theatrical career ; and still more am I astonished that any man should calmly endure that his wife should become an actress, unaccompanied by himself. He must be either a fool or a knave. Nor do I see how a woman is to escape contamination in one form or another. Temptation surrounds her in every shape and on every side : her prospects frequently depend upon the nature and extent of her compliance, and, after all, human nature is very weak. I know I shall have the old, old saying thrust down my throat, that ' to the pure all things are pure ' ; but surely by now that phrase must have lost its power. No one is pure, no one is beyond temptation, and it is unwise in the last degree to expose

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a young girl to the inevitable consequences of a theatrical life."

In all this, there is little that is new—little that is not true. It has been said again and again, since the beginning of the history of the theatre. It is only of late years that the theatre has become a fortress of morality. Assuming that the "moral influence" of the drama is such as it is commonly represented to be, the actors must be surely the most elevated, or the most insensible of human beings. But nothing very much is claimed for them by Charles Wyndham, who had constituted himself the spokesman of his profession. Neither the time nor the place, nor even the company, was well chosen by this champion of Virtue. Mr. Wyndham's defence was delivered at a little supper party given to Mr. Cartwright, a popular actor, by a score of his friends. There is no intrusion upon the privacy of the party in talking of it here, for the speeches were printed in the newspapers, and the list of the company present was given, with the speeches, in the *Era*. "Actors and actresses," said Mr. Wyndham, "living so much in the blaze

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of daylight that they could conceal nothing in their lives, were able to prove a proportionate record every whit as worthy as that of any community in the land." Since when do they "live so much in the blaze of daylight"? Are they not rather night-birds? And why should actors and actresses away from the blaze of the footlights, be unable to conceal nothing in their lives? Does Mr. Wyndham really believe that the "proportionate record" of the domestic life of the actor is as blameless as his own? The "proportionate record," which is all he claims, was certainly not maintained by the company he addressed, taking the names as they appeared in the *Era*. Beerbohm Tree, who rarely misses a chance of making a speech, and rarely makes a speech without missing a chance, availed himself of the same occasion to break what he called "the splendid outburst of contemptuous silence" with which Mr. Scott's outburst of contemptuous candour had been received by the profession. It was not in the proud spirit of the minister who prayed to the Lord to give us a good conceit of ourselves

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that Mr. Tree addressed himself to the company. Mr. Tree, too, was all humility. "Actors and actresses are men and women," he says, "and their lives are not devoid of those temptations which are common to humanity." That is exactly what Mr. Scott says. Their lives are not devoid of such temptations. Not only that, but the temptations are greater in the theatrical profession than in any other, and the power of resistance is not increased in the same ratio. Neither Mr. Wyndham nor Mr. Tree addresses himself to that point. "We are not in the habit of posing as moralists," Mr. Tree continues—who, in the name of conscience, ever said they were?—"but I am proud to think there are among us those who have still the chivalry to cry, 'Hands off! Leave our women-kind [*sic*] alone!'" The study of faces at the table must have been as good as a play, and somebody's neighbours must have moved uneasily in their places at this remark. When the actor cries, "Hands off!" does he imagine that it is only men of rank and fortune who choose their mistresses from the stage?

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It is characteristic of the actor that a little supper party, intended as a compliment to a member of the profession, should be considered an occasion of the slightest public importance. But such is the passion of the members of the profession for publicity, that nothing is too trivial to be turned to account. I can imagine that the editor of the *Era* has his work cut out for him in dealing with a class so avid of advertisement.

To the reader not specially interested in the business of the theatre, the most interesting parts of the *Era*, perhaps, are the advertisements—direct and indirect. The personal references to all sorts of people connected with the theatre, and the allied arts of the music-hall and the circus, are amusing in their guilelessness. I suppose it makes some readers happy to hear about this actor's terrier, or that actress's parrot, or the newspapers would not print such stuff. In the *Era* this sort of thing is carried almost to the degree of burlesque. "Mrs. —, who has been recently indisposed in consequence of an interesting family event, will make her reappearance next week. Baby

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—, we are given to understand, is vigorous, and growing fast; and papa is as well as one can expect, taking into consideration his nightly struggle with the magnanimous Jew in that famous sketch *Humanity*.* Observe the vein of business underlying the domestic sentiment of this exciting news:— “Mr. —, who will spend his holidays at home, as usual, will resume tour again on —.” “Mr. — is back from his most enjoyable jaunt in the south of France and Spain. He made a stay at Biarritz, and visited Bayonne and San Sebastian, both famous places in the annals of the Peninsular War.” And for what is Mr. — famous? “Her Majesty the Queen graciously telegraphed early on Monday morning to Sir Henry Irving, requesting him to call upon Mrs. Terriss, and to convey Her Majesty’s expression of sorrow in the sad and awful affliction that has befallen her. Sir Henry complied with the Queen’s command, adding his own condolence with the bereaved lady.” To

* This illustration and all those which follow are quoted from the issue of the *Era* for December 25th, 1897.

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the murder of that excellent actor, William Terriss, which is the subject of the foregoing paragraph, there are further references. "The suggestion has been made that a statue [of William Terriss] shall be placed on Acton Green, which is within a few yards of the late actor's private house." The name of the author of this amazing suggestion is not given. Still more amazing are the utterances of the ingenuous clergyman who preached a sermon on the murder of the actor, in which he is reported to have spoken in these terms: "In years gone by it was often said that a great gulf divided the Church from the stage. But nowadays opinions have changed, and the work of the stage in Christianizing Christians is publicly recognized. . . . The fact that the feeling throughout England at this moment testifies to conscientious work done by William Terriss makes the Church, without affectation, shed a genuine tear over his remains, as having been one who did his best to elevate humanity nearer to the sphere in which God wishes to see her moving." To talk of the "elevation of humanity" and of "Christianizing Christians" by Adelphi drama is cant, and cant

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of the very worst kind. There is yet no statue of William Terriss on Acton Green ; and now we may be sure there never will be. To entertain such an idea is, as Horace Walpole said in writing of the public worship of David Garrick—assuredly, the greatest actor that ever lived—to confound the immense space between pleasing talents and national services. When Sir Augustus Harris died, the *Daily Telegraph* took an active interest in the promotion of a fund for “immortalizing the memory of so great a man, who is quite a national loss.” Then, again, a statue by public subscription was suggested. Yet it is only the other day that the fountain erected by the subscribers to the Sir Augustus Harris Memorial was denounced by the Strand Board of Works as a nuisance, on account of its neglected condition ! The reverend and guileless gentleman already mentioned is not singular among clergymen in the homage he pays to the actors. I have seen the announcement of an English chaplain in the Tyrol, who was “proud to say that he had secured the services” of an actor—and an actor of the race which has given so much of the best to the stage—to read the lessons. *Credat Judæus.*

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A novel founded by Mr. Wilson Barrett upon his robustious play *The Sign of the Cross*, has been favoured with an "introduction" from a bishop; and Sir Henry Irving has given a public reading, under the patronage of the Dean and Chapter, in Canterbury Cathedral itself. Sir Henry Irving once asked "an eminent bishop" why he never went to the theatre.* "I'll tell you," was the reply, "I'm afraid of the *Rock* and the *Record*." The minor clergy have no such fear: At the present moment, "the great moral value" of a melodrama is being advertised, with the announcement that "no play of the century has received such eloquent encomiums from ministers of religion." With "speeches from the stage by beneficed clergymen" (as advertised), going to theatre on Saturday night may presently compound for not going to church on Sunday morning?

There is nothing in the *Era* which justifies the claims that are too freely advanced on behalf of the stage. Yet nothing that pertains to it passes unrecorded in its columns. The art of the actor is placed frankly upon a commercial basis. Not a few of the pages

* "The Drama." By Sir Henry Irving (Heinemann).

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devoted to advertisements are given up to announcements of the names and addresses of actors and actresses ; in the case of the less distinguished, their "business" is intimated, and when it is a question of musicians terms are also advertised. Musicians are cheap to-day ; the lowest cash price for "a good cornet player" is £30 a year. The names of well-known actors and actresses are printed all in capital letters, in well ordered columns, without so much as an intimation that their acting "is the best." Others particularize—this one is "The Nellie Farren of the Provinces," and that one shines as "Comédienne, Irish Business or Boys," and another is "The most graceful Toe Soloist." There is nothing from "Broken French and Gentlemanly Heavies" to "High-Class Freaks" that is not advertised. Every event, great or small, that touches upon the world of amusement is reported ; the actor learns what is being played not only in London, but in the country and in foreign capitals. For his sixpence he gets plenty of paper, well printed all over ; but for any instructive ideas he may derive from it ; for any use it

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may be to him in the cultivation of his art, he may read the "Actor's Bible" through and through, and be never a penny the wiser.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRITICS.

WHO are the critics? The answer to the question is not to be found in a couplet from *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, or an epigram from *Lothair*. The critic of the theatre is not "ready made." He "must serve his time" at this particular "trade"; and far from having "failed" in the "art" he criticizes, he must bring to its consideration a special knowledge and a sympathetic interest. At most, he may feel, as anyone in the audience may feel, that he could act better than this or that actor in this or that scene; but there may be no more of the talent for acting in the critic than there is of the critical faculty in the actor.

Without such an interest, the critic who goes to the play night after night, might as well be an ox in his stall. For the critic of the

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drama is not free, like the rest of us, to find his entertainment where and when he lists. He must see everything there is to be seen—good, bad, and indifferent. If the claims made for the stage by pretentious actors and arrogant dramatists were justified, the dramatic critic's position could only be compared to that of a literary reviewer who had to pronounce an opinion upon the whole literature of his time. But the range of the drama is not so comprehensive as all that. It is so contracted, indeed, that if plays were judged by the same standard of criticism as books, the critic's praises would be rarer than they are. As it is, the standard of criticism varies. There is the standard of the morning papers, and the standard of the evening papers. Yet it must be acknowledged that the various criticisms not infrequently point to exactly the same conclusions, allowance being made for the customary indulgence of the morning papers, the austerity of the evening papers of the better class, and the artistic prejudices of Mr. William Archer.

Point of view is everything, and whilst the morning papers appeal to the mean intelli-

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gence of the public, the evening papers adapt their tone to the more critical readers. I take no account of the halfpenny journals, with the exception of the *Star*, whose critic, Mr. A. B. Walkley,* is as discriminating, as witty, and as independent as the best, though he writes for the proletariat in a style which credits them with a taste as nice as that of the select few he addresses in the *Speaker*. Mr. Walkley speaks with one voice, unlike some of his colleagues, who suit their manner to their readers. The stern Mr. Archer of the *World*, may unbend himself in a Manchester paper, and still more freely relax his severity, without sacrificing his opinions, in writing for an Indian journal. Mr. Joseph Knight, who is amiability itself, is the critic of the *Daily Graphic*, and of the *Globe*, to which he may be traced by the odd inversions of his phrases, which somehow remind one of a schoolboy's translation from the Latin. He is more critical in the *Athenæum*, for which

* The writer offers no apology for mentioning the critics by their names. For this information he acknowledges his obligation to the *Sketch*, in which the portraits of the "leading London critics" have been published.

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he reserves his decided opinions and his choice poetical quotations. The attitude of the great daily papers towards the theatre is more reserved, more dispassionate, perhaps, than that of those papers in which the personality of the critic is more emphatically asserted. The individuality of the critic, of course, appears inevitably in his work, in his ideas and his expression of them. Nobody could by any chance mistake an unsigned article by Mr. Clement Scott for the work of Mr. William Archer. But no critic reveals himself so thoroughly to his readers as Mr. Walkley, who writes of the theatre frankly with reference to his prejudices, his likes and his dislikes, not merely of the theatre, and his personal habits. That is his attitude. He makes no secret of it, though the secret of making it interesting is possessed by no other writer.

Mr. Walkley is gifted with an original talent. He is a man of taste, who disdains what is mean and foolish, and is a critic of sound judgment, who regards the theatre complacently from a lower point of view than that of some more enthusiastic critics. It

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would never do, of course, for the critic of the *Times* to complain openly, as Mr. Walkley may, that his enjoyment of a piece was marred by the fact that his claret at dinner was corked. Writing in the *Times*, the late Mr. J. F. Nisbet never pretended to consider the theatre as one of the great concerns of life ; and there he stood on the same platform as Mr. Walkley. But Mr. Nisbet had no prejudices. He found nothing in the theatre to disturb the even balance of his mind. There is something condescending, but not offensively so, in the kind of notice which the *Times* gives to the drama. Mr. Nisbet's perception was as clear as his literary style, yet one might say that the theatre had no human interest for him. He praised without enthusiasm, he blamed without compunction. When he applied the word "genius" to an actor or an actress he seemed to do so on the understanding that the term is to be taken in this connection for no more than it is worth. One felt that the mind of the author of *The Insanity of Genius* hardly found room to move in the theatre. The *Daily News* is distinguished among the morning papers by the

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literary quality of the criticisms of Mr. Moy Thomas, whose sound judgment is tempered with mercy. The downright, absolute truth about a play comes out with the evening papers. Mr. Malcolm Watson, who writes in the *St. James's Gazette*, proves in his own person that a critic may write plays and yet remain unprejudiced ; the criticisms of Mr. G. S. Street in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and of Mr. E. F. Spence, in the *Westminster Gazette*, are the candid impressions of playgoers, who judge the stage by its works, not by its pretensions ; and Mr. J. T. Grein, who has been belauded by some as heartily as he has been abused by others for his disinterested services to the Independent Theatre, still continues to assert an aggressive spirit of independence in his outspoken criticisms of plays and actors.

Of all the critics, the most devoted to the theatre are Mr. Clement Scott and Mr. William Archer. They have this in common and nothing else ; for whilst Mr. Scott is the most emotional creature of his sex, responsive to every thrill, Mr. Archer is the least exuberant. Mr. Scott allows his

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mind to be ruled by his emotions, Mr. Archer's emotions are governed by his mind. Mr. Archer, it need hardly be said, is the better qualified to express a judicial opinion, but the best critic is he who feels like Mr. Scott and thinks like Mr. Archer. The character of one and the other imbues his literary style. Mr. Scott is simply carried away by his feelings. He imposes no restraint upon himself. He has that sensitive nature which sometimes enables a woman, without logic, to feel the way to the truth, or to jump at a conclusion, which a man, like Mr. Archer, only arrives at by deliberate reasoning. But whilst Mr. Archer is, at worst, self-opinionated, Mr. Scott is, at best, extravagant. His perception is keen, but his temper is not critical : he is always at one extreme or the other. With all his love of the theatre, I believe Mr. Scott unconsciously has done more harm than any man who has written upon the subject.

There never was a time in the history of the stage when so many good intellects were engaged in writing about the theatre ; and there never was a critic who gave so much thought as Mr. Archer, to what is worth so

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little. So subtle an intellect as his is wasted upon it. Mr. Archer sees all things in the theatre, as Malebranche saw all things in God. His criticisms are valuable in themselves apart from the matter by which they are suggested, as the exposition of a theory of the theatre, impracticable in our generation. The theatre of Mr. Archer's aspirations is not the theatre to which the public at large will ever incline. He writes not in the interests of those who support the theatre, but of that cultivated class who never go to the play. In short, Mr. Archer expects too much of the stage.

Like Mr. Archer, Mr. Scott stands alone. As critic of the *Daily Telegraph* he was the one man among the dramatic critics with whose name the public at large was familiar. A "good notice" in the *Daily Telegraph* was said by managers to be worth more as an advertisement than a criticism in any other paper, when that notice was written by Mr. Scott, and no other. This opinion is quoted as showing the enormous influence which Mr. Scott was supposed to exercise upon public taste. No wonder that he was honoured by the managers above all his colleagues, and sat apart from

them all, on a first night, in the pride of a private box—from which, as a matter of fact, you can only get a one-sided view. Perhaps Mr. Scott sometimes preferred a one-sided view.

The younger men generally, steer the middle course, which is neither too shallow nor too deep, between Mr. Scott and Mr. Archer. Without exalting the stage, they are all for elevating the drama, which has suffered so much from the power and the vanity of the actors, who have been placed in the false position they occupy by the misguided zeal of Mr. Scott and those who have followed the lead of the *Daily Telegraph*. His enthusiasm for the theatre, his intimate knowledge of the drama, and his instinct for good acting, have for years given weight and importance to the opinions of that paper, and his withdrawal from the *Daily Telegraph* deprives the actors of the services of the writer who, above all others, has magnified their calling. The *Daily Telegraph* has made a god of the actor, as it has made a national hero of the cricketer. Only the other day, in acknowledging various contributions to the fund it was raising for the endowment of the hospitals, the paper announced, in

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large type, that "not the least interesting of the private donations is that which appears in the name of Mr. J. L. Toole." In what, I ask, is Mr. Toole's guinea more "interesting," or more "private," than the donation of any other subscriber to the *Daily Telegraph* public fund? To the influence of the *Daily Telegraph* may be traced the preposterous attention which is now given to all that touches the theatrical profession. Indiscretion itself has been out-run by lesser newspapers which have gone far beyond the point at which the *Telegraph* stops. Nothing that pertains to the theatre, or those who live by it, is now considered too mean, too trivial, or too private for publication.

It only raises a smile when one reads, in the organ of the profession, that "Mrs. Beerbohm Tree has given birth to a child, who doubtless inherits some of the genius possessed in such an eminent degree by its gifted parents" *—*un haut et puissant prince agé d'un jour*. It may be, but it is rather early to venture an opinion. Such stuff, however, may interest the theatrical profession not less than the staggering announcement that Miss

* *Era*, January 30th, 1897.

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Phyllis Broughton pays £2 10s. for her boots when she plays a "boy's part."* But the smile is turned to a shudder, when we find a sober literary review† gravely informing its readers of the interesting domestic event in Mr. Tree's history with the intimation that Mr. Tree, on his return from America, "will be met with the intelligence that he is again a father." The friendly relations existing between the actors and the critics may not improbably account for a good deal of such twaddle which appears in the newspapers. But the critics who exchange hospitalities with actors, and belong to the same clubs, are but few, and I am prepared to believe that their critical faculty is not seriously affected by social intercourse. It is difficult, no doubt, to speak unkindly of a person who has shown you kindness. If you like a man, you would naturally hesitate to tell him that you did not like his wine, but his acting is a matter between him and the public, and when the critic has to give an opinion of that, remember that his own reputation is at stake as well as

* *Era*, January 16th, 1897.

† *Athenæum*, February 6th, 1897.

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the actor's. The critics have their prepossessions, no doubt ; but they are honest prepossessions, for every kind of mind—the philosophic, the superficial, the witty, the slow, the literary, the subtle, the simple—is represented in the body of criticism, and the play is considered from every point of view, from that of the vegetarian to that of the ladies learned in the fashions. The late Sir Augustus Harris was once accused of trying to “bribe the press.” “Bribe the press?” he said jocularly, “I wish I could. For ten years I have been trying to find the way to do it.” One might as well attempt to bribe the House of Commons.

It has been said that the critics are subject to all kinds of secret influences, but this, I believe, is mere moonshine, for I decline to entertain the idea that a body of cultured, honourable gentlemen could be so easily corrupted as some people, not disinterested, assume. The insinuation is not less offensive to the critics than to the actors by whom they are supposed to be bribed, and although such charges have been freely made by the gossips of the theatrical clubs, I am not aware that

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such an accusation has ever been sustained. I have heard stories of bribes paid in hard cash by this manager to that critic. But, as a mere question of business, what would be the use of buying the goodwill of one particular critic, when his opinion had to be set against that of the rest of them? Nobody who reads many newspapers, after a first performance, can fail to remark their general agreement except at times upon purely artistic questions, such as the position of Ibsen among the dramatists. When it comes to Ibsen, you may be sure to find Mr. William Archer on one side, as generalissimo of the forces, and the *Standard*, the *Daily News*, and the *Referee* on the other. Then it is Mr. Alfred Watson, Mr. Moy Thomas, and Mr. Edward Morton *contra mundum*. Of the *Daily Telegraph* you could not be so sure, for not only is Mr. Scott uncertain, by reason of temperament, but the opinions expressed in the *Daily Telegraph* might be those, not of Mr. Scott at all, but of another writer whose views concerning the theatre were in many cases so diametrically opposed to those of his colleague, that the readers of the *Daily*

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Telegraph have had sometimes the choice of two different opinions upon the same play. There are supposed to be other ways of "getting at" a critic than by the coarse method of open bribery. Some managers believe it can be done by kindness—by little presents and *petits soins*. But, when all is said and done, I do not think they are to be had for love or money. Stories are told of managers offering commissions to the critics to write plays which are never produced. But how many of the critics pretend to write plays? And a critic may write a play without losing his reputation as a critic; or, as Mr. Scott himself has demonstrated, without making a great reputation as a dramatist. A critic who writes plays, however, does not, as Mr. Scott again has proved, lose his sense of appreciation of other authors' work, although the practice of translating pieces from the French may sometimes pervert his judgment, as in the case once more of Mr. Scott, who has raised the question with regard to the "mutilation of masterpieces": "Which is the better—a mutilated masterpiece, or no masterpiece at all?" The

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question, to the critic, surely admits of but one answer ; but Mr. Scott, who represents an opinion which has the sanction of the public, puts the matter squarely. Thus Mr. Scott : "Is the English public to be denied the pleasure of seeing a beautiful masterpiece because English audiences do not like speeches that last for twenty minutes, or reams of interminable though brilliant talk ? The conditions of the French and English stage are different." To this my reply is that the conditions of the French and English stages are different, and that until English audiences can appreciate masterpieces un mutilated, English audiences should go without masterpieces. Further, I believe that English audiences will be able to appreciate long speeches when our actors are capable of delivering them. That is the candid opinion of a playgoer who can enjoy the plays of Augier and Dumas in the form in which they were written much more than in the perversion of their works which have been prepared for the English stage, and ruthlessly deprived of their form and substance in the process of adapting them to the humbler requirements of the English stage.

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Friendly intimacy between the critics and the actors, which is supposed to be another means of influence, may exist, and this may perhaps account for the fact that criticism of the theatre is, on the whole, so much more lenient than the criticism applied to writers of books, who are not brought so much into direct contact with their reviewers. Even when personal relations do not exist between the critic and the actor, there must always be a feeling of intimacy—a feeling that in criticising the work of an actor one is criticising the actor's own self. It is impossible to consider the work of the actor—as one may consider the work of the author, the painter, or the composer of music—apart from the actor himself, for his work has no separate, independent existence. The criticism of acting, therefore, must be always more or less personal. It is to this sentiment, more than anything else, that we should attribute the excessive use of complimentary terms in criticising the "artists" of the theatre. Let that be understood. A young actress not long ago attributed her want of success to the fact that she did not

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invite her critics to tea, but that young lady may be answered in the terms of Hotspur's retort when Glendower professed to be able to call spirits from the vasty deep. "But will they come, when you do call for them?" The critics are much less sensible to such favours than to good acting. Social influence may be brought to bear upon them, but it is, in nine cases out of ten, or in nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand, unavailing. A young actress, who knows a millionaire, who knows a peer, who knows a bishop, who knows a newspaper editor, may seek, by devious ways, to approach the critic; but the editor of an important newspaper is not likely, just to oblige a lady, to offer an insult to a contributor in whose judgment he has implicit confidence, upon whose honesty he relies. The idea that the advertisements in the newspapers are sympathetically related to the criticisms is not less absurd. Can you imagine the editor of the *Times* discussing the advertisements with the publisher, and then notifying his dramatic critic that an advertisement of the production of a new play has been received at the office, and

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requesting him to be generous to the extent of five shillings—or five pounds, as the case may be? A self-respecting man, to whom such an intimation was addressed, would reply that the advertisements were no business of his, but the publisher's. And the publisher of a reputable paper has quite enough to do to mind his own business. If any such misconceptions as I have mentioned exist, and I believe they do exist to a very great extent in the theatrical profession, it is as well, for the character of that profession, that they should be dissipated.

That the critics are lenient is obvious to the feeblest intellect, but since leniency is general, the public at large is well aware of the depreciation of the critical rupee. With rare exceptions, to speak in metaphor, do the critics insist upon the value of the rupee : Mr. Archer, alone, will have it at par, though some others, who are also concerned for the elevation of the drama, are sincerely determined that it shall not be any further depreciated if they can help it. The public, of course, know exactly what it is worth, and if the critics all took it into their heads one day to tell, not simply the

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truth, but the whole truth, their readers would still make their own deductions. In writing of the drama, the language of hyperbole is commonly employed, and no reader of a newspaper imagines for an instant that when Mr. H. A. Jones's plays are described as "masterpieces" that comparison is suggested with the greatest of Shakespere's works, or that when a young lady, at the beginning of her career, is said to be "a great actress" that she is supposed to equal Siddons. There is, no doubt, a vast amount of uncritical opinion with regard to the stage expressed in publications, more or less illiterate, by men (and women) whose judgment is honest, yet worthless. With this class of person "Pritchard's genteel, and Garrick's six feet high." Of acting, at its best, there is not much to be said. All that is to be written upon the subject of the greatest acting that ever was could be put in a few lines. It is no marvel that the critics, who have to keep on saying the same thing over and over again, have found the ordinary vocabulary inadequate, since they are compelled to write of the actors, as the dramatists give them so

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little upon which to employ their critical faculties. But the actors generally, and the actors only, accept every word of praise at its literal value. Thus it is that the critics have helped to place the actor in the false position he occupies at the present moment, when we have, by all accounts, "great" actors and actresses by the dozen, who have not achieved greatness, but have had greatness thrust upon them.

How many times, I wonder, has George Alexander "surpassed himself" as the hero of romantic drama? If the words were really intended to mean what they seem to mean, one might imagine that he could not have been an actor of much importance at the beginning of his career at the Lyceum, although he had, as a matter of fact, already given his finest performances when he was yet a promising member of Irving's company at the Lyceum. A practised actor like Alexander might derive a momentary satisfaction from such criticism, assuming that it did not strike him as it does me, but the case is different with the inexperienced, whose heads may be more easily turned by

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the praises of the critics and the attentions of the illustrated papers. More mischief, I believe, may be done by over-estimating than by under-estimating the ability of a young actor or actress, who is made famous with a few strokes of the pen. Then there is no more time for study: there is no necessity for it. Having been declared a "consummate artist," what more is there to be done?

When one reads of an actress possessed of "remarkable variety, versatility, and—what is more welcome than both just now on the stage—power," and "here, if we mistake not, is the first flash of the *feu sacré* of art,"* and so on through half a column of a newspaper, the critic, one thinks, must be writing of the performance of an actress of genius in a great play, yet this "wonderful" actress, with her "remarkable variety and versatility and power," is only an ordinary clever actress, and the play in which she manifested such signs of genius that the perfervid critic has to go back, for a comparison, to "the case of Miss Ellen Terry, who in this very Royalty

* *Daily Telegraph*, April 17th, 1896.

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Theatre, more years ago than we care to remember, thrilled us all in a part in which a young girl is reduced to tragic despair by the fear of death by an encircling serpent"—the play is nothing but a poor little piece in one act. To find a match for such hysterical criticism one must go to the same newspaper. The same hand is unmistakable in the description of a scene at Drury Lane Theatre,* when the leading actor stood "bowing and collecting bouquets and baskets of flowers, whilst the men roared themselves hoarse with delight, and the women, with sparkling eyes, waved their lace handkerchiefs." One might imagine that David Garrick had come to life again. But the actor who "delighted everybody," and is held up by the critic as an example of "modesty, decorum, and good taste," is no actor at all, but a prize-fighter who had gone on the stage, as the notorious J. L. Sullivan did before him. It is Mr. James T. Corbett—plain Jem to the Fancy—who "united in his comely person the masher pugilist with the light comedian." As a bruiser, Jem Corbett

* *Daily Telegraph*, April 23rd, 1895.

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had to fight his way up in his profession. As an actor conquest was easier still. The sort of stuff which is presumably relished by some readers pleases others less. As an illustration of my theory of the depreciation of the rupee in criticism it may be stated that such criticisms as I have quoted pass only for what they are worth. If the critic of the *Times* or the *Standard*, who does not attach overmuch importance to the theatre, wrote in such style, the reader would imagine either that the critic really had discovered an actress of the first rank—or was taking leave of his senses.

CHAPTER X.

THE DRAMATISTS.

THIS Renascence of the English Drama, apparently, coincides with the appearance on the scene of a dramatist named Jones. When he speaks of the English drama Mr. H. A. Jones always seems to be talking about himself, and the gist of the volume of essays he has published on "The Renascence of the English Drama" is that "Jones's Dramas are the Best." Now although there are among Mr. Jones's contemporaries, dramatists whose work is more nearly related than his own to literature, the ridiculous pretensions advanced in the name of the Drama—coupled with the name of Mr. Jones—are not justified by any writer for the stage. There is no reason why they should be. Science, religion, art, and

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philosophy, have little or nothing to do with the theatre ; and literature is not the inseparable companion of drama. The feeling for literature is not more common than the taste for art. There are people who find in science, philosophy, or art, their diversion, but it is not by the favour of such as these that the theatre exists. Above all things the drama must be dramatic, and the instinct of the theatre—the dramatic faculty—is more valuable to a writer for the stage than the will to take “the national life by the roots” in the manner suggested by Mr. Jones’s vain fancy. Plays destitute of literary merit may succeed, for a writer of plays, whose brain-power is no greater than the mean intelligence of his audience, may excel as a master of stage craft ; and for want of cunning in the business of the stage, plays of sterling literary qualities may fail utterly. The theatre is the place for theatrical effects. Pure literary effects are of no avail, and fine writing which does not contribute directly to the progress of the action of a play will rarely be endured patiently by an audience.

Literary talent may be combined with the

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dramatic faculty, but it does not often happen so ; and public taste is so little critical that it is quite satisfied to be served by dramatists who are inferiors in mere literary ability of the ordinary popular novelist. In France, the theatre engages the talent of the most distinguished literary men. In this country, Mr. A. W. Pinero stands apart as the literary man among the dramatists. His remarkable literary talent is appreciated by those who are not insensible to the charm of good writing, but if you ask me why Mr. Pinero has been successful, my opinion is that the literary character of his plays has not influenced the public so much as the dramatic qualities of his work. The writing of a play and the story are as body and soul together ; but although I cannot think of another writer capable of conducting the story of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* with such tact, although I do not think anybody but Mr. Pinero could have given to the "farces" of *The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress*, and *Dandy Dick* that touch of polish which seems to elevate them into the region of comedy, still I can imagine that the stories of these plays

might have been made entertaining, by a different—or an indifferent—writer. Certainly, it was not Mr. Pinero's literary style—it was not yet formed, when *The Squire* was written—that made *The Squire* so much more successful than the other play upon precisely the same subject. The question of the literary value of a piece does not trouble one playgoer in a hundred, although good writing may produce such an impression that the effect may be felt even by those who do not understand the cause. Coming out of the St. James's Theatre, after a performance of *The Masqueraders*, a highly sensational piece by Mr. Jones, I heard somebody say, "I preferred his play, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*." "Jones didn't write *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*," said a companion, "did he?" "Of course not; how foolish of me; it was Sydney Grundy, wasn't it?" "No, it wasn't," said the other; "it was Haddon Chambers." That is the public.

Mr. Pinero has rarely taken the public into his confidence; and it cannot be said that he has shown any want of respect for himself or his calling, in leaving his work to speak for

him. To the discussions raised, from time to time, upon the subject of the Drama, Mr. Pinero's sole contribution has been—his published plays.* He has given no other explanations of his intentions and his aspirations. These suffice. The plays of Mr. Pinero remove the reproach made against the stage by Matthew Arnold, who said that we have no dramatic literature. Mr. Pinero's plays belong to literature as well as to the theatre. There has been nothing so good since Sheridan and Goldsmith. For most farces a short life (and a merry one) is all that is expected, but Mr. Pinero's three famous farces have, I believe, an enduring interest. They are well invented, well made, and well written. It is not only in reading them that one recognizes their vitality; the present writer has seen many performances, good, bad, and indifferent of *Dandy Dick*, and has always found it amusing, for it has that virtue by which a play is entertaining apart from the acting; in other words, it is the author, not the actor, who makes it interesting; and it is the honest wit—the preserving salt of a play—which

* The Plays of Arthur W. Pinero. (Heinemann.)

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keeps the thing still fresh and pleasing even when it has no new surprises to offer. The "farces" of Mr. Pinero are not masterpieces of comic literature, but they are the most considerable plays we have of their kind. Although it is as much the fashion of the critical to underrate them as it is to overrate Mr. Pinero's plays of a graver character, if the observation, thought, and originality in a play could be extracted, like gold from the quartz, I think the early farces of Mr. Pinero would yield more than most modern plays of a specific gravity.

It would be going too far to say that it is not as a serious dramatist that Mr. Pinero's mark will be made in literature, for the dramatist has not yet "found himself," as the French say. He may be said rather to have lost himself. *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Benefit of the Doubt* are probably not destined to hold a place upon the stage, though no one can read these two plays without recognizing that the author has put all his heart into his work. It would perhaps be better said that he had put all his mind into it. The interest of these plays is more intel-

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lectual than emotional, and in writing for the theatre it is by the appeal to the feelings rather than to the mind that the attention of an audience is quickened. That is where the inferior dramatist finds his chance. Mr. Pinero is too careful of his reputation, too much of an artist, to be suspected for a moment of having written *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Benefit of the Doubt*, simply because *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* had brought "the woman with a past" into fashion. Mr. Pinero does not follow the fashion. He leads it. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* succeeded not because it introduced "the woman with a past," but in spite of that : it succeeded because it was a fine play. The exposition of the story in the first act of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—the opening scene in which the audience is informed of Aubrey Tanqueray's impending marriage—is a masterly piece of dramatic writing. In this scene, as in the opening scene of *The Benefit of the Doubt*, the audience is not only prepared for the story, but interest is excited at the same time in the characters of the play—in themselves as characters, not merely on account of

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their bearing upon the issue. That the idea existed in the minds of the theatrical managers and of the dramatists that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* attracted the public by reason of the introduction to the stage of "the woman with a past" was shown by the succession of plays—in which mere coarseness was mistaken for character—by which it was briskly followed—from *John o' Dreams*, by Mr. Haddon Chambers, of which the heroine had been a prostitute who was described, quite gratuitously, as the daughter of a woman who had followed the same calling, to Mr. H. A. Jones's *The Triumph of the Philistines*, in which a worthless baggage was freely allowed to outrage propriety, and not only propriety, but common sense as well. All these "women with a past," however, have now gone to limbo. The only one of them with a future is the archetypal woman with a past presented by Mr. Pinero.

It is to be deplored that Mr. Pinero devoted himself so persistently to the subject of the unhappy marriage that it seemed to have become an obsession with him until he turned upon himself, and showed us Love triumphing

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all along the line, in *The Princess and the Butterfly*, a long-winded play which was only too clever by half, or, at least, by a third. But the three plays which seem to end with "and they lived unhappily ever after" can never have been considered as an indication of a narrowness of vision: for the case is presented always from different aspects, and the three plays together represent a world of deep thinking upon a question which has acutely agitated a generation whose life and manners Mr. Pinero has designed to reproduce on the stage. It is only in reading such a play as *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* that one realizes fully the moral force of it. In reading the play, one is struck by many lines of which the point was lost on the stage, not from any fault of the actors, but simply because it was impossible to carry it over the footlights. There are ideas too fine, shades of meaning too subtle, for acting. It is impossible that something should not be missed in the representation of work of this sort. Writing which loses its effect on the stage, however, does not comply with the rules of dramatic proportion, and in *The Princess and the Butterfly*

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Mr. Pinero still shows more consideration for the reader than for an audience in giving more attention to ideas than to action. For a comedy such as *The Princess and the Butterfly* may be as much imbued with thought as a drama professedly serious, and in coming back to a mood of less austerity, Mr. Pinero again raises the hope that he may yet write a great comedy of manners of our time.

Next to Mr. Pinero—*longo intervallo proximus*—Mr. H. A. Jones has made himself the most conspicuous dramatist of the present day. Mr. Jones has an unmistakable talent for writing for the stage, although he has never approached the ideal of his own exalted professions. He holds the position with regard to the drama that Mr. Hall Caine occupies among novelists. Of the earnestness of the one or the other I do not permit myself to entertain any doubt. They have both that most valuable spirit of enthusiasm, which not only carries them on headlong, but communicates itself, as the case may be, to the spectator or the reader whose intelligence is not above the level of their own. Their

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intentions may be as lofty as they ask us to believe, but their capacity is not equal to their intentions; and they give one the impression always of drawing conclusions as big as a mountain from premises the size of a mouse. Their expansive style of writing suggests a mind untrained and unrestrained. They have a natural talent, which is not hampered by self-criticism, and this confidence gives to their imagination a boldness and a strength which compensate for their striking defect. Curiously enough, the consequence is that when Mr. Jones or Mr. Hall Caine is obviously taking most pains, he is least effective—as in *The Christian* of Mr. Hall Caine, and in *Michael and His Lost Angel* of Mr. Jones. This play I must say in justice to the genius of the author and to the penetration of Mr. Joseph Knight, a professional critic, has been declared to be “in the full sense a masterpiece” and worthy to “take rank” with *Antony and Cleopatra*, among “the masterpieces of human passion.” If *Michael and His Lost Angel* must take rank with the masterpieces, then Mr. Jones’s plays must have an excellent title to immortality, for

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his severest judge must allow that he has written plays far better than this. Yet the best of his work is of the stage, stagey. Not that this is a fault in pieces written for the stage; it is, on the contrary, the best proof of the author's instinct of the theatre. It is only when we see Mr. Jones's plays in the nakedness of print that they lose the pleasing qualities they have in representation.

Following the example of Mr. Pinero, Mr. Jones has published a selection of his plays. A play that is as exciting on the stage as *Judah* (for instance) may very well leave the reader unmoved. "An author wrote a piece, which had an extraordinary success, and he printed it, in order not to take advantage any longer of the esteem of the public."* In reading the published plays of Mr. Jones, the wonder to me is that I have been so easily pleased at the theatre. The illusion is all gone out of them, and events and characters which seemed credible enough for the purposes of the stage are too remote from life to bear reflecting upon. In the

* "Les aventures de Gil Blas de Santillane," Book VII. ch. 12.

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complete theatre of Mr. H. A. Jones there is not one character that seems life-like to me, always excepting the dog Bully-boy in *The Dancing Girl*. The persons of his plays have characteristics, but no character; they are drawn with strength, but not with subtlety. The eminent medical man, in *The Physician*, so far as I can remember, did not possess any peculiar attributes of eminence or even of a physician; the eminent lawyer, in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, I remember simply by the attributes of Charles Wyndham; of the eminent Cabinet Minister, in *The Bauble Shop*, I remember only that he was courting a girl in a toy-shop at the time of a political crisis; but the pleasure I derived from these pieces does not come back to me very vividly, and it is mainly by recalling the names of the actors and actresses associated with particular parts that I remember many of the plays at all. The hero and the villain cut cards for a wife; a barmaid's kisses are put up to auction, and the gentleman who loves her *pour le bon motif*, not only stands by, but actually bids up to thousands of pounds for a kiss—they do such amazing things in Mr.

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Jones's plays. But it all seems like so much trickery when you come to think it over.

In the preface to *The Case of Rebellious Susan* Mr. Jones relates a conversation which he overheard in a railway carriage. "‘Ah, who wrote that play?’ I heard one passenger inquire of another. ‘That man Henry Arthur Jones,’ replied his neighbour. ‘I hate that fellow,’ said the other. ‘He’s always educating the public.’” There is absolutely nothing in the plays of Mr. Jones to justify such silly remarks. Whatever good qualities there may be in his work—and it is not without mastering the art of presenting a story with telling theatrical effect that Mr. Jones has obtained popularity—he has certainly not exercised any “educational” influence. In effect Mr. Jones is most successful in scenes of pure theatricality, and except in *The Tempter* I do not know that he has ever assumed the cloak of the moralist or the singing-ropes of the poet. *The Tempter* is the most ambitious, as it is the least effectual of all his plays, and the limitations of his talent are marked by this great effort to rise to the poetical and philosophical. Into the mouth

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of the Devil himself, Mr. Jones has put such philosophy and poetry as this :—

The worst of sin
Is that it sets a bad example. When
It's strictly covered up and nothing known
There's not much harm in it.

The observation is not daringly original, and the words are very much like ordinary prose cut into verse lengths. The sight of Canterbury Cathedral inspires this poor Devil's imagination with nothing more eloquent than this :—

Canterbury ! Canterbury ! My city !
My ancient, guzzling, brawling, thieving, cursing,
Lying, lousy, stenchy, bawdy city !
My grace and greeting to you.

Such flights are not likely to carry the name of Jones into the fellowship of the poets, and the Devil's reflections, concise as a telegraphic message, do not startle by their profundity :—

Wine—woman—virtue—bed—philosophy
All useful things but seldom found together.

A devil of a philosopher this !

Among the dramatists of our time, Mr. Pinero always excepted, the most original

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talent and the most considerable is that of Mr. W. S. Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert's work, however, is done. "He himself has said it, and it's greatly to his credit," to use his own words, which come pat, as quotations from his operas will do. Mr. Gilbert's work belongs not so much to the present or to the future, as to the past. His latest—his last—contribution to the theatre differed from the ruck of plays produced at any time these twenty years past, only by the quality of the mocking humour, which might have passed for the first really excellent imitation of Mr. Gilbert, if *The Fortune Hunter* had been produced anonymously, or if one could believe it possible for anybody to imitate so well his wit and irony. But Mr. Gilbert's humour is not, and never was, suited to the ordinary purposes of the drama. It is so peculiarly characteristic of the writer, as distinguished from the persons of his dramas, that the character most clearly defined in his plays is invariably that of the author himself. Mr. Gilbert is a cynic, and cynicism, as the pervading spirit of a play, not of an individual character, will not do on the stage, except in

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plays avowedly cynical or fanciful, or both, and then their relation to drama becomes strained. The nearer Mr. Gilbert endeavours to approach actual life the further he gets from success.

I do not remember a real, human character, male or female, in any one of his pieces. Yet his work has a greater literary value than most plays. This is but a secondary consideration, however, in writing for the stage, and even the literary value of his earlier work was much overrated in its day. His *Pygmalion and Galatea* could hardly hold the attention of a critical audience in these times any more than the French opera, on the same subject, which went out of fashion about the time Mr. Gilbert's play came into vogue. Mr. Gilbert himself has rendered that impossible. His comic operas have made us familiar with his more finished work in the same style.

He may be said to have "found himself" in comic opera. His way of looking at life—with a kind of intellectual strabismus—was exactly suited to the work in which he has made his greatest success. The cardinal fault of his plays becomes a charm in comic

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opera, and no one resents the intrusion of the author's own personality in these pieces any more than in a novel by Thackeray. It is something to have introduced to the stage a new form of entertainment ; and not only to have introduced a new form, but to have brought it to perfection. There has been nothing like it. It began with Mr. Gilbert, and with Mr. Gilbert it ended. No writer for the theatre has made such a mark upon his age. Mr. Gilbert created a taste, and he alone has satisfied it. His comic operas might be as dead as Queen Anne, but not forgotten, and as the little Aristophanes of his day Mr. Gilbert has established a title to remembrance. Something of the music, in which Sir Arthur Sullivan has so faithfully caught the spirit of the author, may also survive, but there are little poems, exquisite in idea and expression, scattered about Mr. Gilbert's operas, which need no music to keep them alive. With this much baggage Mr. Gilbert may go down to posterity. Among his contemporaries, how many are there whose all will not be utterly lost in the gutter of time ?

But the dramatist has not much to hope

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for from posterity : he is the voice of his times speaking to his own generation. From Shakespere to Goldsmith, from Sheridan to our own day, what is left to the stage of all the plays that ever were written ? An "immense success" withers in a season. Literary merit will not make a play, although it may assure it a long life, and those dramatists who consider literary form before stage effect, misapprehend the first principle of writing for the stage. Mr. Wilson Barrett, who has little more appreciation of literary expression than a bull of Sèvres china, has written one of the most money-making plays of its day, *The Sign of the Cross*. Such a play may offend the critical by the vulgarity and pomposity of the language in which a grandiose theme is developed, but the subject of the play is dramatic and the treatment is dramatic—in short Mr. Barrett has the dramatic faculty. One wishes him more intellectual refinement; but he may dispense with that with less concern than a polished writer may dispense with such mastery as he has of the business of the stage. Mr. Barrett is a prosperous builder of plays, because he understands

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his business. He is a craftsman, not an artist.

Mr. Louis N. Parker is an instance of a dramatist kept too much under restraint by literary feeling. His work has sometimes a grace beyond the reach of the actor ; he appeals not so much to the feelings as to the intellect, and one is disturbed merely, when one should be deeply moved. His best work seems unsubstantial. His wit is pleasant, and his literary style, urbane ; but gentleness and urbanity are not the qualities which produce powerful effects on the stage. Mr. Parker has more to unlearn, than he has to learn. He has the faculty of telling a story and of developing character concurrently with the action of a play ; and it is by these means that a dramatist obtains his greatest effects. The future belongs to Mr. Parker, and there is nothing that one can see between the most distinguished of our living dramatists and the author of *The Vagabond King*. Not that *The Vagabond King*, with its poetic sentiment, its polished wit, and its original plot, is the best Mr. Parker has yet done. His *Rosemary* is the very prettiest, sentimental comedy of a

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generation. Here, for once, the literary man in Mr. Parker does not get the upper hand of the dramatist. On the contrary, we see the reverse of that position, when the dramatist goes too far, as Mr. Parker sometimes will do, for the purpose of making the utmost of a contrast. In the last act of *Rosemary* theatrical effect is overdone, and the balance of the play, so skilfully maintained up to that moment, is rudely upset at the end. In *Rosemary*, as in *Gudgeons*, a narrower play than the first, measured only by the compass of the emotions, Mr. Murray Carson is associated with Mr. Parker in authorship. But Mr. Parker's own undivided work is that upon which my appreciation of his talent is based, and it will be time enough to consider Mr. Murray Carson's talent as a dramatist when he has written a play alone. It is not for the clever work he has done already, but for what he is likely to do when he has learned the difference between staginess and stage effect, that Mr. H. V. Esmond's name may be mentioned here. Mr. Malcolm Watson still delays the fulfilment of the promise he displayed in *The Pharisee*.

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Mr. Ralph Lumley, whose plays are witty and ingenious, has not yet come into his own. His most amusing piece, *The Thoroughbred*, was hidden away in a cupboard, as one may say, at Toole's Theatre, and Mr. Lumley has been not more fortunate on other occasions in the company by which his play has been acted and in the theatre at which it has been produced—two considerations which seriously affect the fortunes of a piece. Mr. Lumley is a comic writer who deserves more encouragement than he has received. There is more observation of life and character, as there is also more invention, in his farces than you may find in some much more pretentious plays. Mr. Lumley is in touch with his times ; he does not take his characters from his own fancy or his view of life from the dramatists who have gone before him, as Mr. R. C. Carton does.

Mr. Carton's work is written with more care than most plays of the class to which they belong. But Mr. Carton has no moments of real inspiration ; his plays are the manufactured article. Everything is artifice, even to the dialogue, which abounds

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in that kind of obvious repartee which is as easy as rhyming. *Liberty Hall* and *Sunlight and Shadow* please the sentimental, who are the great majority of every audience, and that is the secret of Mr. Carton's success. Such sweetstuff, perhaps, is not the best thing for the public; but it is not the least wholesome. In *Lord and Lady Algy*, Mr. Carton proves that he can do better, just as Mr. Haddon Chambers in the *Tyranny of Tears* asserts himself as a writer of more wit, more insight, more distinction, than his sensational dramas represent him to be. With these two plays, which seem to have been written without reference to the peculiarities of any manager, Mr. Carton and Mr. Chambers come directly to the front as writers of pure comedy; and it has happened, as it always happens with a really good play, that there were, in either of these comedies, more surprises of acting than usual. In writing for the theatre, Mr. F. C. Philips fails from want of heart. He rarely lays hold of the sympathy of the audience, which is the first thing a dramatist must think of doing. Mr. Philips has no regard for the feelings of an audience, and his

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studies in high-class blackguardism are far more interesting in his novels than they are on the stage. The novelists, when they turn dramatists, do not seem to realize that they are addressing a different public from that which reads. Mr. Robert Buchanan has plainly recognized the difference. But he has rather underrated than overrated the requirements of the playgoer, and it seems as if it must have been another person of the same name who wrote the memorable novels and the imperishable poetry of Robert Buchanan.

Among the novelists, Mr. J. M. Barrie occupies a proud position, but he is content to put his pride in his pocket, when he enters the theatre, and a comparison of his play *The Little Minister* with the novel upon which it is founded, reveals the distinction between a good play and a good novel. For *The Little Minister* is a good play, if not a great play; and even in its inconsistencies the author shows a respect for the conventions of the stage. The differences between *The Little Minister*, stage version, and the original work are, in every instance, a sure advantage on the stage. Mr. Barrie's respect

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for the conventions of the theatre is greater, perhaps, than his respect for his own work as a novelist. He has played the part of an unfeeling parent towards *The Little Minister*. In his contributions to the stage, he has practised a little too much economy by drawing upon his own published works, but *Walker London*, *The Professor's Love Story*, and *The Little Minister* indicate the steady progress of Mr. Barrie's career as a dramatist. Although his field of vision is not large, we may yet look to him for plays of importance. Better Mr. Barrie's perversion of his own stories than the ordinary process of turning novels into plays by writers who cannot be said to have improved upon the style or design of the novels they have transferred to the stage. Their position here is that of the village tailor, who puts a bill in his window: "Gentlemen's own material made up." The business of making plays out of novels is not the most economical means of establishing a reputation as a dramatist. Mr. Sydney Grundy has, perhaps, an easier job in making new English plays out of old French comedies. Even in adaptations from the

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French it is possible to distinguish between the work of a Sydney Grundy and the herd of writers who have turned French gaiety and wit into English as scannel farce. Mr. George R. Sims, like Mr. Grundy, is a dramatist whose early career was full of promise which has not been justified by his later performances. From the first, Mr. Sims seemed likely to reach a higher position than Mr. Grundy, and a list of the memorable plays of our time would include *The Lights of London* of Mr. Sims, whose cockney characters are as real and as humorous as the rustics of Mr. Pinero or the humble Scots of Mr. Barrie. Upon the work of the dramatists who derive their surest inspiration, not from the pen, but from the penny, there is no reason to linger.

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POST SCRIPTUM.

THE present condition of the stage is discouraging ; it is discouraging alike to the coming actor and to the coming dramatist. But they will come, actor and dramatist, making their way against all obstacles and difficulties. Time, which devours everything, is the enemy of the actor-manager, who is, as I think I have shown, not the least of the contributory causes of the enervation of the drama and of acting in our day. For the actor has become more and exalted, but the drama has not shown any corresponding progress. Nor do I see how it is to improve, until the actor once more takes his proper place as the servant instead of the master, as he is now, of the dramatist. Sir Henry Irving, by his commanding talents as an actor and as a manager—by the force and charm of his personal character—made the position

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of actor-manager a tenable one ; but it is only an Irving who could hope for a lifelong popularity under a system accompanied by all those disadvantages upon which I have dilated. Sir Henry Irving, at least, has given a vogue to Shakespere in his generation, as Phelps—a great and zealous master of his art—did in his ; and Irving's influence has not been insignificant : from time to time, his example has been followed by other managers, Wilson Barrett, Beerbohm Tree, and George Alexander. But the greatest of all Sir Henry Irving's triumphs has been the conquest for his calling of a place in public esteem. It has been the work of a life-time. But where shall we look for another to hold the position he has won not only by talent, but by ardour, discretion and devotion ? In no other condition of life does one man stand in the same relation of overmastering supremacy as Sir Henry Irving stands—unchallenged to this day—to all the rest of the world of the theatre.

I believe firmly that the system of the actor-manager, under which the stage is languishing, is doomed to collapse, sooner or later. Soon or late, that depends upon the caprice of the

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public and upon the policy of the actor manager. It will be latest for the actor-manager who considers not merely his own advancement as an actor, but his obligations to the public as a manager. He has only to engage a company of the best available talent, and to engage them, it is not superfluous to add, with the intention of making the best use of their talent. It is to the theatres under the direction of intelligent men of business that we may look most confidently for the encouragement of good acting. Actors there are, no doubt, who still take their art earnestly; actors who have something of the pride of an artist in their calling. But they are deprived by the inexorable force of present circumstances of the means of giving expression to their talent.*

* The case, from the point of view of the actor, was put fairly and squarely by "a correspondent connected with the stage" in the *Daily Chronicle* (December 28th, 1898), who wrote in reply to "An Actor" who had raised the question of the crushed comedian. This "correspondent connected with the stage" says: "Kissing goes by favour in the theatre to a greater extent than in probably any other calling, and much of the incompetence which is unquestionably fostered on the stage might, without exaggeration, be fairly placed at the door of the social aspirations of the manager, who is constantly being beset with applications for people by relations and friends who would, in America at all events, be designated

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I have done. It is possible that I may be told that I have written with prejudice. I disclaim, at once, any feeling against the theatre. For it is as one deeply interested in the concerns of the theatre that I have spoken my mind frankly, freely, honestly. The balance of judgment has been falsified in all that relates to the stage. In attempting to redress the balance, I have endeavoured to avoid the fault of exaggeration, which it is my sole aim to correct ; but we have become accustomed to speak of the theatre in terms so extravagant, that it seems almost ungracious to consider soberly its place in the economy of our national life. Yet the actor and his art, and the public also, will benefit, I am sure, by a saner understanding of the legitimate uses of the theatre. I speak as a lover of the theatre. I am "the friend of Plato"—whose judgment

as 'having a pull.' But there is another and a broader question attached to this. Some of the actor-managers are themselves lacking in many of the qualifications which would ordinarily make them the representatives of protagonist parts, did they not have the first, last, and only voice in the matter, and, therefore, in selecting their company they naturally grade down from themselves, so that their capacity is at the head and front of their company . . . as long as 'society' and the stage maintain their present relations, it is difficult to see how this is to be altered."

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of the actor there has been no reason to reverse upon appeal to posterity — and not less “the friend of Truth.” I love the theatre; but not as Caligula loved his horse, which he wished to make a consul. I would keep it in its proper sphere. I have written from intimate knowledge of the Stage in my own country and in other countries, in which I have seen the best and the worst it has to offer. I desire only the good of the Drama, and it is my belief that this is to be achieved, not by exaggerating the functions of the theatre and exalting the actor’s calling. To the playgoer who demands more of the theatre, or less, I say, in the words of Brutus in the play :—“If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.”

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