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Oscar Wilde Scrapbook

Vol. 3

Mr. Oscar Wilde's New Play at the St. James's Theatre

BY W. MOY THOMAS

THE English stage appears to be suffering just now from a sort of epidemic of irrational heroes. One of the most remarkable cases was that of the hero of *Forgiveness*, who permitted himself to be unjustly branded as an impostor and an extortioner, and who even abandoned the woman he adored to the mercies of a designing scoundrel rather than adopt a simple, convenient, and obvious course which was equally open to him. It is a striking evidence of the infectious character of the outbreak that *Forgiveness* has been immediately followed at the same theatre by a play which suffers from the same glaring fault. The hero of *Lady Windermere's Fan* assumes the airs of a chivalrous gentleman, and is in fact presented as a model of romantic generosity; yet he deliberately and persistently treats his young and beautiful wife in a way which stamps him as either an idiot or a brute. Lady Windermere has made the painful discovery that her husband's frequent absences from home are due to the circumstance that he spends his time with one Mrs. Erlynne, a woman of something more than doubtful reputation. The fact has become a public scandal and the husband's cheque books, left exposed with a cynical heedlessness, afford proof that he has been bestowing upon this adventuress frequent gifts of large sums of money. Lady Windermere, at all events, is straightforward. She taxes her husband directly with his offences. He replies simply with a general assurance that his conduct is more innocent than it seems; and without further explanation he requires his wife to receive the suspected rival at a ball to be given in celebration of Lady Windermere's birthday. In vain the wife pleads; in vain she threatens to strike the intruder across her face with a fan—her husband's present. Lord Windermere persists, and in due course Mrs. Erlynne arrives, and, dispensing with the ceremony of an introduction to the hostess, conducts herself in an ostentatiously insolent and obtrusive fashion. Lady Windermere, however, shrinks from executing her threat, and, though she has been depicted as a person of even austere morality, prefers the course of quitting her husband's roof to seek shelter in the chambers of Lord Darlington, a profligate nobleman, who, emboldened by this domestic estrangement has insolently made love to her.

But Lady Windermere is not the only person from whom the explanation of her husband's strange conduct was studiously withheld. Through act after act the spectators on the first night were left in the same perplexing uncertainty. Had the audacious adventuress discovered some youthful peccadillo on the part of his lordship—some fraud or forgery—some act of justifiable homicide that might be construed to be murder? Was she privately using threats of exposure to compel him to inflict unendurable humiliations upon a loving wife? Surely, no, for these are the stale conventionalities of melodrama, and Mr. Oscar Wilde is nothing if not unconventional. Mr. Wilde has since made confession that on principle, and in opposition to Mr. George Alexander's wishes, he was determined to show that the cherished canon of the playwright's art, which forbids any prolonged mystification of an audience, is a mere supersition. He now admits himself to have been in error in this matter, and just as the "new school of criticism," which is prone to extend to heterodoxy an indiscriminate welcome, is foolishly applauding "Mr. Wilde's daring in defying the rules, and keeping his secret to the last," Mr. Wilde announces that he has gone back to the rules. But, unfortunately, concealment was not the only worm in the bud of Mr. Wilde's invention. It may be right to explain more promptly, but then the explanation should be rational and sufficient. Lord Windermere's excuse that Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere's long-missing mother; that he had been simply endeavouring to aid her to regain a position in society, which she had forfeited by her own misconduct; and that he had refrained from telling his wife the truth in order to spare her the pain of learning that her mother is not a dead saint but a living sinner, clearly fails to account satisfactorily for his conduct. Painful to the daughter, no doubt, the disclosure would have been, but infinitely less painful than the series of brutal insults which finally drove the wife from her home.

It must not be inferred, however, that even from the point of view of construction Mr. Wilde's play exhibits no skill. The scene in which Lady Windermere is extricated by Mrs. Erlynne's presence of mind from her equivocal position in Lord Darlington's chambers before her visit is even known to her tempter, and in spite of her jealous husband's discovery of her fan left behind on the table, may not be particularly novel—few stage incidents ever are—but it is handled with true dramatic instinct, and beyond question it greatly excited and interested the audience. Nor did the gratitude of Lady Windermere, blossoming into a generous faith in her suspected rival's assurances, or the final affectionate parting of mother and daughter without the disclosure of the secret of their relationship, put too severe a strain upon the spectators' faith. Mr. Wilde, in brief, has shown, in spite of the grave defects of his story, a decided vocation for that "actable drama," which he affects to despise. When we couple with this the amusing qualities of the dialogue with which the author has provided his little world of cynical folk, the cordiality of the reception of the comedy is sufficiently accounted for. Though not always judiciously cast—Mr. Gould, for example, is clearly not *dans son assiette*, as Frenchmen say, in the part of the gay unscrupulous Lord Darlington—the play is on the whole extremely well acted. Mr. Alexander's peculiar gift of strong but subdued passion would no doubt be seen to more advantage if the situation had been less obviously artificial; but this does not apply to Miss Lily Hanbury's earnest and powerful impersonation of Lady Windermere, or Miss Marion Terry's clever performance as Mrs. Erlynne, though impudent adventuresses are certainly not this actress's special vocation. Mr. H. H. Vincent contributes a capital portrait of the cynical old beau, Lord Augustus Lorton; equally good is Miss Fanny Coleman's amusingly worldly-minded Duchess of Berwick and Mr. Ben Webster's Cecil Graham. The little world, in fact, who flirt and scandalise, and make mock at serious aims in life with so little acerbity, so much wit, and incidentally with so many touches of social satire, furnish quite a collection of recognisable types, all of which are filled in with more or less cleverness by the various performers.

ST. JAMES'S THEATRE. Lessee and Manager.—MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER. EVERY EVENING at 8.30 punctually, a New and Original Play in Four Acts by Mr. Oscar Wilde, entitled LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN. FIRST AFTERNOON PERFORMANCE THIS DAY (SATURDAY) at 2.30. Box Office open daily, 10 till 5.

THE PASSING HOUR.

THE occasion of the presentation of Mr. Oscar Wilde's new play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was one of considerable literary interest, and was expected to attract an unusually brilliant audience to the St. James's Theatre on last Saturday night. As a matter of fact the company in the boxes and the stalls did not differ in any perceptible manner from that which is usually present on first nights. The principal "strangers" who were "spied" were Lord and Lady Londonderry, who occupied the Royal box, presumably attracted by the presence of a "Vane-Tempest" in the cast of the play. Mrs. George Alexander was with them. Lord and Lady Londesborough, with some member of their family occupied the stage-box opposite; and Mrs. Langtry was in another box; Mr. Alfred Rothschild with a large family in a fourth; and Mrs. Oscar Wilde in a fifth. Field-Marshal Sir Frederick Haines, who is indefatigable as a first nighter, was in the stalls, and in the same quarter of the house were Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Luke Fildes, R.A., Mr. Inderwick, Q.C., Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. Oswald Crawfurd, Dr. and Mrs. Playfair, Mr. Rudolph and Miss Lehmann, and, of course, the entire army of critics.

THE DIARY OF A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

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SATURDAY.—To the first night of Oscar Wilde's new play at the St. James's. The "first nights" at the St. James's Theatre are always such amusing affairs that, had I not a consideration for Mr. George Alexander's banking account, I should like one every week. Everybody is always there, and everybody is always in their cheeriest and most genial moods; and to-night was enjoyable from all points of view. The dresses on the stage are each and all marvels of the modiste's art, while a bonnet worn by Marion Terry—which is made of velvet and embroidered in steel—induced me to transgress the tenth commandment without a moment's hesitation. She wears a lovely dress, too, of pearl-tinted *moiré antique*, with a floral design in gold tinsel upon it, and a gold girdle round the hips. With this, just on one shoulder she has a huge bunch of ostrich feathers, and in her hand she carries a superb bouquet of orchids. She has a very striking opera-cloak made of a copper-coloured and pink shot brocade with large sleeves fitting tightly at the wrists, and a Watteau-pleat at the back. Miss Lily Hanbury has a charming dress of pink cachemire with an *appliqué* of brown velvet embroidered in gold thread. This has a coat of brown velvet and sleeves of the pink, and is perfect but for the pink band round the waist. Had I been her sartorial adviser this would have been brown! However, her white dress has not a single fault. It is of *crèpe de chine* and *crèpon*, with a quaint zouave and a full Watteau pleat, and everywhere it falls in the most delicious folds with innumerable ends of satin ribbons fluttering down one side with infinite grace. Marion Terry's grey velvet gown, embroidered in steel and trimmed with marabout, is very becoming, and her ingenuous confession that with pink shades she is twenty-nine and without them thirty, appeals to me irresistibly by the very "womanity" of it. I hope it will not be quoted too often.

VIRGINIA.

APRIL 29, 1893

HAYMARKET THEATRE.—Lessee and Manager, MR. H. BEERBOHM TREE.—EVERY EVENING at 8.30.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.
(By Mr. Oscar Wilde.)

Mr. and Mrs. Tree, Miss Julia Neilson, Miss Rose Leclercq, Miss Le Thiére, Miss Horlock and Mrs. Bernard-Beere. Mr. Fred Terry, Mr. Kemble, Mr. Allan, Mr. Clark, &c. Doors open 8; carriages 11. Box Office (Mr. Leverton) open to 6 and 8 to 10. Seats may be booked six weeks in advance; also by letter or telegram. MATINEE TO-DAY and EVERY SATURDAY, at 2.30.—HAYMARKET THEATRE.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

BY OSWALD CRAWFURD.

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To what are we to ascribe the extraordinary depression in the theatrical world? Play after play that seemed to have promise of popularity in it has been taken off the bills, and the exchequers of many theatres that remain open are by no means flourishing, while "paper" is apparent to the practised eye in almost every audience. The depression cannot be laid at the doors of the music-halls, for they too are not doing "the good business" they were. Yet London is full, and the theatre in the abstract was never seemingly so popular. Then why do people not flock to hear and see what they profess to admire? Probably the answer is that they are waiting, if not for better at least for fresher stage work. When a manager has made a success his first thought is to repeat it—a good policy so far as his own theatre is concerned, but as a plan of campaign all along the line of playgoers, the worst possible. The playgoers are of the kind who, beyond others, "love some new thing." They are always wanting a new departure, not the same string harped upon even if it gives out a musical note. That may have something to do with the success of Mr. Oscar Wilde's two plays, which the critics do not wholly approve—that and the freshness of his comedy-presentment of life, and his wit.

prevailed in the days of that scamp Henri Quatre, days which we, after having carefully loooked up our French history, will remember to have been signalised by pomp, extravagance, and luxury of every description. Magnificent are the stuffs, and the brocades, and the embroideries which Mr. Fenwick holds out to us as temptations; and, as Oscar Wilde's heroine—or was it hero?—observed, I can resist anything but temptation.

OUR LIBRARY TABLE.

IN spite of his showy paradoxes, Mr. Oscar Wilde, in his volume of essays called *Intentions* (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.), succeeds in proving that he has something to say, and [illegible] would think, or find, it [illegible]

NOVELS OF THE WEEK.

The Picture of Dorian Gray. By Oscar [illegible] (Ward, Lock & Co.)

vigorously ridden hobby-horse of affectation, they beget amusement rather than offence. It is difficult to be angry with the author or displeased with his play. 'An Ideal Husband' has a certain amount of story, the development of which proves not uninteresting. Accident is too potent a factor in the action to permit of its being [illegible] dramatic. Without the aid of [illegible] ation could never

a third. He successfully resisted all the attempts of Wilberforce and his friends in both Houses to remove ecclesiastical judges from the final court of appeal, probably for some more substantial reason than the peril to the Royal supremacy, upon which he dilated with his usual unction. Very likely Dr. Pusey was right, and the bishops arranged the Purchas judgment. When it had been once delivered, Tait spent himself in well-meant endeavours to get it respected. He had many excuses. Dr. Pusey disliked and disapproved the vestments. Bishop Wilberforce thought that the toleration of the eastward position would be accepted as a compromise (and this was conceded by the Ridsdale judgment); he could not forget that the Westerton judgment had been accepted. Canon Furse was not alone in thinking that the decision of the final court of appeal would be final. Tait chose to assume that its decisions would be more acceptable when it had been remodelled. The existence of the question annoyed almost everybody. Tait, who was always clear-sighted and often short-sighted, decided to pass the Public Worship Act as remodelled by Lord Shaftesbury, because otherwise there would have been an explosion of Protestantism, even worse than in the time of the "Papal aggression." It might have been much worse, and yet insignificant enough. However, Tait had the courage to use all his influence in the Commons to save the episcopal veto; and the Act has not been exactly barren, though the number of churches where the Mackonochie and Ridsdale judgments are disobeyed goes on increasing. Since the ritualists have been forced to pose as defenders of law against prerogative, they have confined themselves upon the whole to what they understand to be lawful. Tait had nothing of the temper of a persecutor. Like Trajan, he refused to initiate prosecutions himself; even when a private prosecutor appeared, if a clergyman could be brought to show any [illegible] of substantial deference to his bishop, he was anxious to soothe and protect him; otherwise he was grimly content to let the law take its course. In most things he was as kind as it is possible to be without intelligent sympathy. It was a frequent direction to his secretaries: "Tell him he is a most consummate ass; but be sure to do it very kindly." For this reason much was forgiven him. The public gave him full credit for his goodwill. They were grateful for his abortive labours to relieve them of the Athanasian Creed, which is not even an apt expression of the belief of those who successfully defended it as a part of a serious and not hopeless protest against the popular view that it does not matter what kindly, upright, clean-living people believe; though no doubt this protest *would* be weakened by the disuse of a time-honoured and weighty form of sound words.

Upon the whole, Tait's career, both as bishop and archbishop, counted as a success, just as the foundation of the Bishop of London's Fund counts as a great work. With many helpers, he raised a sum of nearly half a million in the course of ten years. The Fund is now a permanent institution; it still raises £23,000 a year: every year at least fifty men in the diocese make as much single-handed. He had other successes. He made peace between Bishop Copleston and the Church Missionary Society; he not only got Parliament to recognise the bishop's veto on ritual prosecutions in practice, he also got Convocation to recognise the bishop's veto on ritual innovations in theory; he carried the majority of the bench with him in voting for the Burial Act of 1880. The Dissenters had persuaded themselves that they wished their own ministers to bury them in the churchyard; the Clergy had persuaded themselves that there would be a liberation meeting in every churchyard over every Dissenter's grave. Happily, the Dissenters hardly ever use the privilege they extorted, which does not exactly vindicate the foresight of Tait. He cared about the questions for which the influential laity cared; his first charge inspired many leading articles; it dealt with the same sort of topics in the same sort of spirit, which was thought a daring attempt to grapple with the realities of life. He always seemed to be dealing sensibly and manfully with questions which he would not understand and could not decide—in the eyes of a public who wished they were not there to decide. His intellectual interests, too, were those of sensible, old-fashioned, influential men. He made a great deal of time for reading, and he spent it on standard books thirty or forty years old. The only important books he seems to have read when they were new were Haeckel, whom he easily dismissed in a spirit of sceptical conservatism; *Supernatural Religion*, which he did not overrate; and *Philochristus*, of which he missed the point, completely overlooking the suggestion that the chief priests sent by night and stole His body to cast it out with the thieves.

The book suggests some general reflections: a Lambeth Conference is very like a Polish Diet; the Anglican Communion still more like the Polish Republic, where confederations to support the Liberum Veto generally succeeded, confederations to suppress it generally failed. The modern Church of London is very like the primitive Church of Corinth; but modern Westminster is very unlike ancient Rome, for in Westminster Archbishops, Presidents of the Council, and Lord Chancellors meet constantly without a wink.

G. A. SIMCOX.

Intentions. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

MR. WILDE, in speaking of the methods open to the critic, well says that Mr. Pater's narrative is, of course, only criticism in disguise: his figures are but personifications of certain moods of mind, in which he is for the time interested, and which he desires to express. Now I have been wondering whether one should not, similarly, regard Mr. Wilde essentially as a humorist who has taken art-criticism for his medium, just as Carlyle was a humorist in the odd disguise of a prophet. Certainly, I am inclined to think that much of his intricate tracery of thought and elaborate jewel-work of expression is simply built up to make a casket for one or two clever homeless paradoxes. "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose." Mr. Wilde somehow struck that out, and saw that it was deserving of a better fate than to remain a waif of traditionary epigram; so he went to work on Lamb's strange friend, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, one of the subtlest art-critics and poisoners of his time, unearthed his curious history, made selections from his criticism, and then set his own epigram, diamond-wise, in the midst of a biographical essay. Various readers solemnly add to their historical knowledge, discuss the strange character of the man, study his criticism; but Mr. Wilde sits and watches his epigram sparkling far within. About Wainewright he cares far less than the reader, about his own epigram—far more.

Of course this is not the whole truth about these *Intentions*; the whole truth is a many-coloured thing about a personality so complex as that of the author of *Dorian Gray*. But it is the dominant tendency among many others hardly less powerful. Mr. Wilde's worship of beauty is proverbial, it has made a latter-day myth of him before his time; and yet, at least in these essays, his gift of comic perception is above it, and, rightly viewed, all his "flute-toned" periods are written in the service of the comic muse. Where he is not of malice aforethought humorous, where he seems to be arguing with serious face enough, is it not simply that he may smile behind his mask at the astonishment, not to say terror, of a public he has from the first so delighted in shocking? He loves to hear it call him "dangerous," as some men delight to be called "roué."

There will be many who will, as the phrase is, take him seriously; but let me assure them that Mr. Wilde is not of the number. It all depends what one means by the phrase; for I, for one, take Mr. Wilde very seriously as a creator of work which gives me much and various new pleasure: he is so absolutely alive at every point, so intensely practical—if people could only see it—and therefore so refreshingly unsentimental; he is wittier than is quite fair in a man of his nationality, and he often writes prose that one loves to say over for mere pleasure of ear—his own literary touchstone. The artistic temperament should delight in him, for the serious in the pursuit of literary pleasure he is as serious as every new joy must be; it is only in the domain of thought where it is rather funny to see him taken with such open mouth. Not that Mr. Wilde is not a thinker, and a very subtle one too; but it is rather, so to say, as a damascener of thought, than a forger of it, that he is to be regarded. Of course all things are relative; and to the unsophisticated Ernest of Mr. Wilde's dialogue on "The Critic as Artist" it is certain that the brilliant half-truths with which the sadder and wiser Gilbert lit up their all-night colloquy, as with weird fireworks, were "strange things" and dangerous to the younger man.

"You have told me many strange things to-night, Gilbert. You have told me that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do

THE PASSING HOUR.

it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; you have told me that all art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in the work of art what the artist had not put there; that it is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, and not rational. My friend, you are a dreamer."

Had Ernest read Mr. Pater, to whom Mr. Wilde makes the continual affectionate reference of a disciple, or had he "with a little rod" touched what the Laureate calls the "honey-poison" of France—chanced, for instance, on a passage in which M. Anatole France says that

"la critique est, comme la philosophie et l'histoire, une espèce de roman à l'usage des esprits avisés et curieux, et tout roman, à le bien prendre, est une autobiographie;" and continues, "Le bon critique est celui qui raconte les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre"—

had Ernest been twenty-five instead of presumably nineteen, or had he even at that age possessed a larger measure of the artistic temperament, that night in the Piccadilly library would have lost none of its charm, but it would hardly have been so spiritually dislocating for the poor boy. For the "autobiographical" theory of criticism is no more the secret of M. Anatole France or Mr. Pater than of Mr. Wilde: it belongs to every subtly developed temperament, and has unfortunately been practised in England all too much by men who are anything but subtle. Every small author is eager to give us "les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre;" but exquisite things happen on that quest to few—to Mr. Pater, to Mr. Henry James, occasionally to Mr. Henley, and certainly to Mr. Wilde. He himself does not take Ernest seriously. It is part of the fun of dialogue as a form for criticism, he says, that the critic "can invent an imaginary antagonist and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical argument."

One must not forget that the form is dialogue, and therefore dramatic. Otherwise, we may be inclined to resent some of Gilbert's information, besides missing the subtle pleasure of watching a young innocent soul undergoing initiation. It was for that—among other things—that Mr. Wilde wrote these two "colloquies," as they used to be called, on "The Critic as Artist"; it was not to tell us that creation is as essential a part of criticism as criticism is of creation. All the same, we are glad of the definition of criticism as "a creation within a creation," and of this clear-sighted illustration of its operation.

"The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will serve his purpose. And just as out of the sordid and sentimental amours of the silly wife of a small country doctor in the squalid village of Souville l'Abbaye, near Rouen, Gustave Flaubert was able to create a classic, and make a masterpiece of style, so, from subjects of little or no importance . . . the true critic can, if it be his pleasure so to direct or waste his faculty of contemplation, produce work that will be flawless in beauty and instinct with intellectual subtlety."

Mr. Wilde is speaking of criticism in its highest form, in the same sense as Matthew Arnold spoke of poetry as "a criticism of life." Of the humbler form of it known as reviewing, he makes one or two commonsense remarks—

"As a rule," he says, "the critics . . . are far more cultured than the people whose work they are called upon to review. This is, indeed, only what one would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation does. . . . The poor reviewers are apparently reduced to be the reporters of the police courts of literature, the chroniclers of the doings of the habitual criminals of art. It is sometimes said of them that they do not read all through the works they are called upon to criticise. They do not; or, at least, they should not. . . . Nor is it necessary. To know the vintage and quality of a wine one need not drink the whole cask."

It belongs to Mr. Wilde's paradoxical method that he should continually play on the convertibility of terms. Thus, the whole contention of his essays on criticism is that criticism and creation are essentially one and the same, or, at least, that they necessarily dovetail one into the other; and yet towards the end of this essay we find Gilbert saying "it is certain that the subject-matter at the disposal of creation is always diminishing, while the subject-matter of criticism increases daily." Here we have the two terms crystallised once more to their hard and fast everyday meaning, while all through they have been used as convertible. This is apt to bewilder. As a rule, however, Mr. Wilde gains his effects by adhering to the concrete signification of words. This reduces some of his contentions to a mere question of terms. One often feels: Now, if that word were but changed for another, for which it really stands, there would be nothing further to say. But that, of course, would not do for Mr. Wilde, nor, indeed, for us, to whom, presumably, subject is nought and treatment is all. Occasionally, by this means, it follows that Mr. Wilde seems to beg the question; as, for instance, in his remarks on morality in art. When he says, "All art is immoral," he is using the word in its narrow relative sense; he does not mean by it the same as those who use it seriously against certain schools and forms of art: though they say "immoral" they mean "unspiritual," and that is the meaning many people will attach to the word in Mr. Wilde's phrase. They will thus be quite unnecessarily shocked by a mere quibble of words, and their real position is left unassailed; the real question at issue being whether or not there is certain art which is dangerous to the spirit, of which one should feel as Mr. Pater says in *Marius*: "This is what I may not look at." If life be really a struggle between higher and lower, if art is anything more than a form of sensuous indulgence, this is a question to be answered. Mr. Wilde does not leave us quite clear as to his side in the matter, though he seems to lay over-much stress on the sensuous side of art, a side which is, after all, external and impossible without an informing, formative soul. He echoes, too, Gautier's tirades against "virtue," and Mr. Swinburne's

"What ailed us, oh gods, to desert you
For the creeds that refuse and restrain?"

and says hard things of chastity and self-sacrifice—really a very "young" and quite illogical position in an age which has accepted evolution. He quotes M. Renan to the effect that "Nature cares little about chastity"; but does that prove anything save that Nature is always behind the age, as Mr. Wilde tells us in another place? Surely it is by such ideals, of which, once seen, the beauty haunts him through all his sinnings, that man evolves at all, striving and failing and striving, till slowly what was once the ideal becomes the instinct.

But I am not recking my own rede, and am in danger of growing quite "heated," as they say of politicians, while Mr. Wilde is doubtless smiling in his sleeve.

Let us leave contention and enjoy. I have referred to two or three of the interesting qualities in these papers. They are so absolutely alive. Every sentence is full of brain. There is no padding, no vagueness, all is "thought out," as the painters say. One has that safe, untroubled feeling in reading that Matthew Arnold's calm dissecting method gives us—though, needless to say, the austerity of the *Essays in Criticism* is a very different thing from this luxuriously coloured prose: however difficult the thesis, we leave it to the writer with perfect confidence that he will speedily make all clear. Mr. Wilde has, indeed, a rare power of keeping his eye steadily "on the object." It is doubtless, too, a part of his perversity that while, as we have seen, he will, when it suits him, adhere rigidly to the fixed signification of words, he can at other times exercise a quite remarkable power of reducing them to their elements, of remorselessly forcing them to say what they really mean. "You must not be frightened by words," said Gilbert to his young neophyte; and certainly, if you set such words as "unpractical," "dangerous," or "dreamer" on to Mr. Wilde they will come in for the same summary dissection that befel the lion which attacked the strong man in Holy Writ.

Mr. Wilde's delight in words for their own sake is quite Rabelaisian. He loves so to spread them in heaps, like a child bathing its hands in rich, many-coloured beads, that sometimes he is in danger of a lack of proportion, and catalogues that remind us of the Whitmanese. But some of his tapestries in which, in a brief pageant, he shows us again the Trojan war, or Dante threading the circles of his great dream, are beautiful; and in passages such as the following his technical knowledge of artistic methods, especially handicraft, give us a sense of surefootedness, a pre-Raphaelite distinction of impression very quickening to the imagination:

"The sculptor hewed from the marble block the great white-limbed Hermes that slept within it. The waxers and gilders of images gave tone and texture to the statue, and the world, when it saw it, worshipped and wa

OUR LIBRARY TABLE.

IN spite of his showy paradoxes, Mr. Oscar Wilde, in his volume of essays called *Intentions* (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.), succeeds in proving that he has something to say, and it is a pity that he should think, or find, it necessary to resort to the tricks of the smart advertiser in order to attract attention to his wares. He runs the risk of making his readers throw down his book in disgust, and he spoils his style by making it mechanical. To call Mr. Wilde's favourite rhetorical figure by the name of paradox is really too complimentary; he carries his joke too far, and makes paradox ridiculous. The form of language in which he chooses to conceal his thoughts is easily described. His method is this: he takes some well-established truth, something in which the wisdom of centuries and the wit of the greatest men have concurred, and asserts the contrary; then he whittles his assertion down, and when at his best arrives at the point which might have been reached by starting at the other end. Piquant at first, but soon wearisome, his method does sometimes succeed in that illumination of the commonplace which constitutes originality. The first essay, called 'The Decay of Lying' (which means the growth of realism), is by far the cleverest. Here Mr. Wilde, in the intervals of his labour over paradoxes and self-contradictions, has spared time to think for himself. In speaking of writers about art Mr. Ruskin must, of course, be left in the place which he incontestably occupies by himself. But speaking of lesser people, after "Vernon Lee" hardly any one has a better claim than Mr. Wilde to be named as a contributor of something fresh, something original and stimulating, amongst the mass of matter about art that has been written during the last twenty years. Next to 'The Decay of Lying' comes a paper on Wainewright the poisoner, which is not much above the ordinary level of magazine padding, and then Mr. Wilde returns to art matters. In two essays on 'The Critic as Artist' his besetting habit holds the mastery over him, and the reader becomes heartily weary of it. Making every allowance for Mr. Wilde's tiresome way of expressing himself, one cannot extract anything of much value from these two papers. In the 118 pages which they occupy Mr. Wilde has attempted to make sense of a number of propositions such as these:—that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; that all art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than creation, and so on. He is at times naturally driven to desperate assertions. He says that ordinary people have a glib, ignorant way of saying, "Why should we read what is written about Shakspeare and Milton? We can read the plays and the poems. That is enough." The obvious truth is, of course, that ordinary people say and do just the reverse. And ordinary people, too, who write spend their labour in writing about literature instead of labouring to write literature. Again, what can Mr. Wilde have been thinking of, except effect, when he said that bad artists always admire each other's work, as a summary of his theory that good ones do otherwise? Had he forgotten his Vasari and the evidence of the golden age of the great Italian artists? His statement that "to the æsthetic temperament the vague is always repellent" is almost as reckless. When he speaks of Matthew Arnold's definition of "literature" as a criticism of life he is worse than reckless. When he speaks of the Caffè Florian at Venice as "Florio's," of the author of the 'Ode to Evening' as Collin, and of Wainewright's being in "goal," he shows, perhaps, that strict accuracy is beneath him. But these are trifles. No one can read Mr. Wilde's book without being convinced of the strong ability which he does so much to hide, and without hoping that he has now sufficiently sown his literary wild oats and will some day devote himself to writing something more solid and reasonable and not less brilliant than 'Intentions.'

824 Nº 3322, JUNE 27, '91

NOVELS OF THE WEEK.

The Picture of Dorian Gray. By Oscar Wilde. (Ward, Lock & Co.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde's paradoxes are less wearisome when introduced into the chatter of society than when he rolls them off in the course of his narrative. Some of the conversation in his novel is very smart, and while reading it one has the pleasant feeling, not often to be enjoyed in the company of modern novelists, of being entertained by a person of decided ability. The idea of the book may have been suggested by Balzac's 'Peau de Chagrin,' and it is none the worse for that. So much may be said for 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' but no more, except, perhaps, that the author does not appear to be in earnest. For the rest, the book is unmanly, sickening, vicious (though not exactly what is called "improper"), and tedious.

113 Nº 3352, JAN. 23, '92

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, and other Stories. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde's little book of stories is capital. They are delightfully humorous, witty, and fresh, sparkling with good things, full of vivacity, and well put together. 'The Canterville Ghost' is a first-rate ghost story, told partly from the point of view of the ghost himself—a most refreshing novelty—and partly from that of the American family who have bought the ancestral home of the Cantervilles. 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' is a very good story, too, told in a vein of drollery which is quite distinctive. These two pieces will bear reading aloud, a decidedly severe test.

177 Nº 3354, FEB. 6, '92

A House of Pomegranates. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

The adornment of these "beautiful tales," as Mr. Wilde modestly calls them, has been entrusted to Messrs. C. Ricketts and C. H. Shannon, and for combined ugliness and obscurity it would be hard, we imagine, to beat them. The full-page illustrations are so indistinctly printed that whatever excellence they may possess is lost to view, while the grotesque black-and-white woodcuts are hideous to behold. It is, perhaps, as well that the book is not meant for the "British Child"; for it would certainly make him scream, according to his disposition, with terror or amusement.

57 Nº 3507, JAN. 12, '95

DRAMA

THE WEEK.

HAYMARKET.—'An Ideal Husband,' Comedy in Four Acts. By Oscar Wilde.

ONE of the constituent elements in wit is the perception of analogies in things apparently disparate and incongruous. Accepting this as a canon and testing by it the pretensions of Mr. Oscar Wilde in his latest play, that writer might be pronounced the greatest of wits, inasmuch as he perceives analogies in things absolutely antagonistic. His presumable end is gained, since a chorus of laughter attends his propositions or paradoxes. It requires, however, gifts of a kind not usually accorded to humanity to think out statements such as "High intellectual pleasures make girls' noses large," "Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast," "All reasons are absurd," and the like. Uttered as these things are by Mr. Charles Hawtrey, who for once is entrusted with *fadaises* instead of fibs, they pass muster and create amusement, and it is not until one turns to them again that one perceives how impertinent and extravagant they are. As parts of the trapping of a vigorously ridden hobby-horse of affectation, they beget amusement rather than offence. It is difficult to be angry with the author or displeased with his play. 'An Ideal Husband' has a certain amount of story, the development of which proves not uninteresting. Accident is too potent a factor in the action to permit of its being genuinely dramatic. Without the aid of *ficelles* the required termination could never have been reached. When reached even it is wholly disproportionate to what the author holds to be the offence, and a man whom Mr. Wilde sets before the audience as a traitor and a scoundrel escapes with no worse penalty than a fright and with one of the most coveted of human rewards. Nothing, in fact, beyond a curious complication is brought about by human folly. Separate scenes and characters are amusing and interesting, and the whole, with the salt of Mr. Wilde's impertinence, wins acceptance. The scenes and costumes are exquisite, and much of the acting is praiseworthy. Mr. Hawtrey and Mr. Brookfield, the latter as a servant, are seen to most advantage in a cast that comprised Mr. Waller, Mr. Bishop, Miss Fanny Brough, Miss Florence West, Miss Vane Featherston, Miss Maude Millett, and Miss Helen Forsyth.

In 'Thyrza Fleming' Miss Dorothy Leighton deals, with apparent openness, with a subject indicated in 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' and in 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' Her hero espouses the daughter of a woman with whom he has had relations which are described as "close," but are discreetly left undefined. We have not yet gone so far back to the antique world as to contemplate such matters with pleasure, or even with equanimity, and the play, though accepted with respect and even pleasure by the select and much-enduring patrons of the Independent Theatre, would scarcely be relished by a general public. Mr. Bernard Gould and Miss Winifred Fraser played in it as the mated lovers, the mother rival of her daughter being presented by Miss Esther Palliser, who shows histrionic possibilities as yet wholly undeveloped.

260 Nº 3513. FEB. 23, '95

DRAMA

THE WEEK.

ST. JAMES'S.—'The Importance of being Earnest,' a Play in Three Acts. By Oscar Wilde.

THE mantle of Mr. Gilbert has fallen on the shoulders of Mr. Oscar Wilde, who wears it in jauntiest fashion. Not one gleam of sense or sanity is there in the piece, which he paradoxically describes as a trivial comedy for serious people, and on which, in sheer wantonness of contempt for his public, he has bestowed the punning title of 'The Importance of being Earnest.' Ernest, it may be said in explanation, is the assumed name under which two characters woo successfully two maidens. When their right to the name is shown to be non-existent their hold upon their respective fair ones is imperilled, and they have to use strenuous exertions to obtain a semblance of right to a baptismal appellation not bestowed on them in conventional fashion at their birth. Hence the genesis of a title not more preposterous than the piece. Nothing, perhaps, shows more clearly or convincingly the magical influence exercised by the footlights than the success of Mr. Wilde's play, which was received with delight. Stage diamonds to be effective must be paste; on the stage tinsel is better than gold; and chemical preparations enhance, if they do not eclipse, the bloom of youth and beauty. It almost seems as if the same law applied to dialogue. Nowhere except on the stage would a being supposed to be reasonable make a governess tell her pupil to study for an hour political economy, but to omit as too exciting the depreciation of the rupee, or an aristocratic

Nº 3513, FEB. 23, '95

MR. MORELL's curious experiment of producing 'An Ideal Husband' at five o'clock in the afternoon proved so far a success that the more fashionable parts of the house were filled. One difficulty presents itself to ladies who at the close of the entertainment wish to dine at half-past seven or eight in some central spot, hotel or other, in London, namely, the necessity of returning home to dress.

genially with so many touches of social satire, furnish quite a collection of recognisable types, all of which are filled in with more or less cleverness by the various performers.

having carefully loooked up our French history, will remember to have been signalised by pomp, extravagance, and luxury of every description. Magnificent are the stuffs, and the brocades, and the embroideries which Mr. Fenwick holds out to us as temptations; and, as Oscar Wilde's heroine—or was it hero?—observed, I can resist anything but temptation.

THE GRAPHIC

Mr. Oscar Wilde's New Play at the St. James's Theatre

BY W. MOY THOMAS

The English stage appears to be suffering just now from a sort of epidemic of irrational heroes. One of the most remarkable cases was that of the hero of *Forgiveness*, who permitted himself to be unjustly branded as an impostor and an extortioner, and who even abandoned the woman he adored to the mercies of a designing scoundrel rather than adopt a simple, convenient, and obvious course which was equally open to him. It is a striking evidence of the infectious character of the outbreak that *Forgiveness* has been immediately followed at the same theatre by a play which suffers from the same glaring fault. The hero of *Lady Windermere's Fan* assumes the airs of a chivalrous gentleman, and is in fact presented as a model of romantic generosity; yet he deliberately and persistently treats his young and beautiful wife in a way which stamps him as either an idiot or a brute. Lady Windermere has made the painful discovery that her husband's frequent absences from home are due to the circumstance that he spends his time with one Mrs. Erlynne, a woman of something more than doubtful reputation. The fact has become a public scandal and the husband's cheque books, left exposed with a cynical heedlessness, afford proof that he has been bestowing upon this adventuress frequent gifts of large sums of money. Lady Windermere, at all events, is straightforward. She taxes her husband directly with his offences. He replies simply with a general assurance that his conduct is more innocent than it seems; and without further explanation he requires his wife to receive the suspected rival at a ball to be given in celebration of Lady Windermere's birthday. In vain the wife pleads; in vain she threatens to strike the intruder across her face with a fan—her husband's present. Lord Windermere persists, and in due course Mrs. Erlynne arrives, and, dispensing with the ceremony of an introduction to the hostess, conducts herself in an ostentatiously insolent and obtrusive fashion. Lady Windermere, however, shrinks from executing her threat, and, though she has been depicted as a person of even austere morality, prefers the course of quitting her husband's roof to seek shelter in the chambers of Lord Darlington, a profligate nobleman, who, emboldened by this domestic estrangement has insolently made love to her.

But Lady Windermere is not the only person from whom the explanation of her husband's strange conduct was studiously withheld. Through act after act the spectators on the first night were left in the same perplexing uncertainty. Had the audacious adventuress discovered some youthful peccadillo on the part of his lordship—some fraud or forgery—some act of justifiable homicide that might be construed to be murder? Was she privately using threats of exposure to compel him to inflict unendurable humiliations upon a loving wife? Surely, no, for these are the stale conventionalities of melodrama, and Mr. Oscar Wilde is nothing if not unconventional. Mr. Wilde has since made confession that on principle, and in opposition to Mr. George Alexander's wishes, he was determined to show that the cherished canon of the playwright's art, which forbids any prolonged mystification of an audience, is a mere superstition. He now admits himself to have been in error in this matter, and just as the "new school of criticism," which is prone to extend to heterodoxy an indiscriminate welcome, is foolishly applauding "Mr. Wilde's daring in defying the rules, and keeping his secret to the last," Mr. Wilde announces that he has gone back to the rules. But, unfortunately, concealment was not the only worm in the bud of Mr. Wilde's invention. It may be right to explain more promptly, but then the explanation should be rational and sufficient. Lord Windermere's excuse that Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere's long-missing mother; that he had been simply endeavouring to aid her to regain a position in society, which she had forfeited by her own misconduct; and that he had refrained from telling his wife the truth in order to spare her the pain of learning that her mother is not a dead saint but a living sinner, clearly fails to account satisfactorily for his conduct. Painful to the daughter, no doubt, the disclosure would have been, but infinitely less painful than the series of brutal insults which finally drove the wife from her home.

It must not be inferred, however, that even from the point of view of construction Mr. Wilde's play exhibits no skill. The scene in which Lady Windermere is extricated by Mrs. Erlynne's presence of mind from her equivocal position in Lord Darlington's chambers before her visit is even known to her tempter, and in spite of her jealous husband's discovery of her fan left behind on the table, may not be particularly novel—few stage incidents ever are—but it is handled with true dramatic instinct, and beyond question it greatly excited and interested the audience. Nor did the gratitude of Lady Windermere, blossoming into a generous faith in her suspected rival's assurances, or the final affectionate parting of mother and daughter without the disclosure of the secret of their relationship, put too severe a strain upon the spectators' faith. Mr. Wilde, in brief, has shown, in spite of the grave defects of his story, a decided vocation for that "actable drama," which he affects to despise. When we couple with this the amusing qualities of the dialogue with which the author has provided his little world of cynical folk, the cordiality of the reception of the comedy is sufficiently accounted for. Though not always judiciously cast—Mr. Gould, for example, is clearly not *dans son assiette*, as Frenchmen say, in the part of the gay unscrupulous Lord Darlington—the play is on the whole extremely well acted. Mr. Alexander's peculiar gift of strong but subdued passion would no doubt be seen to more advantage if the situation had been less obviously artificial; but this does not apply to Miss Lily Hanbury's earnest and powerful impersonation of Lady Windermere, or Miss Marion Terry's clever performance as Mrs. Erlynne, though impudent adventuresses are certainly not this actress's special vocation. Mr. H. H. Vincent contributes a capital portrait of the cynical old beau, Lord Augustus Lorton; equally good is Miss Fanny Coleman's amusingly worldly-minded Duchess of Berwick and Mr. Ben Webster's Cecil Graham. The little world, in fact, who flirt and scandalise, and make mock at serious aims in [illegible] much wit, and incidentally with so many touches of social satire, furnish quite a collection of recognisable types, all of which are filled in with more or less cleverness by the various performers.

FEBRUARY 27, 1892

BLACK AND WHITE

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ST. JAMES'S THEATRE. Lessee and Manager.—MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER. EVERY EVENING at 8.30 punctually, a New and Original Play in Four Acts by Mr. Oscar Wilde, entitled LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN. FIRST AFTERNOON PERFORMANCE THIS DAY (SATURDAY) at 2.30. Box Office open daily, 10 till 5.

THE occasion of the presentation of Mr. Oscar Wilde's new play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was one of considerable literary interest, and was expected to attract an unusually brilliant audience to the St. James's Theatre on last Saturday night. As a matter of fact the company in the boxes and the stalls did not differ in any perceptible manner from that which is usually present on first nights. The principal "strangers" who were "spied" were Lord and Lady Londonderry, who occupied the Royal box, presumably attracted by the presence of a "Vane-Tempest" in the cast of the play. Mrs. George Alexander was with them. Lord and Lady Londesborough, with some member of their family occupied the stage-box opposite; and Mrs. Langtry was in another box; Mr. Alfred Rothschild with a large family in a fourth; and Mrs. Oscar Wilde in a fifth. Field-Marshal Sir Frederick Haines, who is indefatigable as a first nighter, was in the stalls, and in the same quarter of the house were [illegible], Mr. Inderwick, Q.C., Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. Oswald Crawfurd, Dr. and Mrs. Playfair, Mr. Rudolph and Miss Lehmann, and, of course, the entire army of critics.

SATURDAY.—To the first night of Oscar Wilde's new play at the St. James's. The "first nights" at the St. James's Theatre are always such amusing affairs that, had I not a consideration for Mr. George Alexander's banking account, I should like one every week. Everybody is always there, and everybody is always in their cheeriest and most genial moods; and to-night was enjoyable from all points of view. The dresses on the stage are each and all marvels of the modiste's art, while a bonnet worn by Marion Terry—which is made of velvet and embroidered in steel—induced me to transgress the tenth commandment without a moment's hesitation. She wears a lovely dress, too, of pearl-tinted *moiré antique*, with a floral design in gold tinsel upon it, and a gold girdle round the hips. With this, just on one shoulder she has a huge bunch of ostrich feathers, and in her hand she carries a superb bouquet of orchids. She has a very striking opera-cloak made of a copper-coloured and pink shot brocade with large sleeves fitting tightly at the wrists, and a Watteau-pleat at the back. Miss Lily Hanbury has a charming dress of pink cachemire with an *appliqué* of brown velvet embroidered in gold thread. This has a coat of brown velvet and sleeves of the pink, and is perfect but for the pink band round the waist. Had I been her sartorial adviser this would have been brown! However, her white dress has not a single fault. It is of *crèpe de chine* and *crèpon*, with a quaint zouave and a full Watteau pleat, and everywhere it falls in the most delicious folds with innumerable ends of satin ribbons fluttering down one side with infinite grace. Marion Terry's grey velvet gown, embroidered in steel and trimmed with marabout, is very becoming, and her ingenuous confession that with pink shades she is twenty-nine and without them thirty, appeals to me irresistibly by the very "womanity" of it. I hope it will not be quoted too often.

VIRGINIA.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

BY OSWALD CRAWFURD.

TO what are we to ascribe the extraordinary depression in the theatrical world? Play after play that seemed to have promise of popularity in it has been taken off the bills, and the exchequers of many theatres that remain open are by no means flourishing, while "paper" is apparent to the practised eye in almost every audience. The depression cannot be laid at the doors of the music-halls, for they too are not doing "the good business" they were. Yet London is full, and the theatre in the abstract was never seemingly so popular. Then why do people not flock to hear and see what they profess to admire? Probably the answer is that they are waiting, if not for better at least for fresher stage work. When a manager has made a success his first thought is to repeat it—a good policy so far as his own theatre is concerned, but as a plan of campaign all along the line of playgoers, the worst possible. The playgoers are of the kind who, beyond others, "love some new thing." They are always wanting a new departure, not the same string harped upon even if it gives out a musical note. This may have something to do with the success of Mr. Oscar Wilde's two plays, which the critics do not wholly approve—that and the freshness of his comedy-presentment of life, and his wit.

prevailed in the days of that scamp Henri Quatre, days which we, after having carefully loooked up our French history, will remember to have been signalised by pomp, extravagance, and luxury of every description. Magnificent are the stuffs, and the brocades, and the embroideries which Mr. Fenwick holds out to us as temptations; and, as Oscar Wilde's heroine—or was it hero?—observed, I can resist anything but temptation.

a third. He successfully resisted all the attempts of Wilberforce and his friends in both Houses to remove ecclesiastical judges from the final court of appeal, probably for some more substantial reason than the peril to the Royal supremacy, upon which he dilated with his usual unction. Very likely Dr. Pusey was right, and the bishops arranged the Purchas judgment. When it had been once delivered, Tait spent himself in well-meant endeavours to get it respected. He had many excuses. Dr. Pusey disliked and disapproved the vestments. Bishop Wilberforce thought that the toleration of the eastward position would be accepted as a compromise (and this was conceded by the Ridsdale judgment); he could not forget that the Westerton judgment had been accepted. Canon Furse was not alone in thinking that the decision of the final court of appeal would be final. Tait chose to assume that its decisions would be more acceptable when it had been remodelled. The existence of the question annoyed almost everybody. Tait, who was always clear-sighted and often short-sighted, decided to pass the Public Worship Act as remodelled by Lord Shaftesbury, because otherwise there would have been an explosion of Protestantism, even worse than in the time of the "Papal aggression." It might have been much worse, and yet insignificant enough. However, Tait had the courage to use all his influence in the Commons to save the episcopal veto; and the Act has not been exactly barren, though the number of churches where the Mackonochie and Ridsdale judgments are disobeyed goes on increasing. Since the ritualists have been forced to pose as defenders of law against prerogative, they have confined themselves upon the whole to what they understand to be lawful. Tait had nothing of the temper of a persecutor. Like Trajan, he refused to initiate prosecutions himself; even when a private prosecutor appeared, if a clergyman could be brought to show any sign of substantial deference to his bishop, he was anxious to soothe and protect him; otherwise he was grimly content to let the law take its course. In most things he was as kind as it is possible to be without intelligent sympathy. It was a frequent direction to his secretaries: "Tell him he is a most consummate ass; but be sure to do it very kindly." For this reason much was forgiven him. The public gave him full credit for his goodwill. They were grateful for his abortive labours to relieve them of the Athanasian Creed, which is not even an apt expression of the belief of those who successfully defended it as a part of a serious and not hopeless protest against the popular view that it does not matter what kindly, upright, clean-living people believe; though no doubt this protest *would* be weakened by the disuse of a time-honoured and weighty form of sound words.

Upon the whole, Tait's career, both as bishop and archbishop, counted as a success, but as the foundation of the Bishop of London's Fund counts as a great work. With many helpers, he raised a sum of nearly half a million in the course of ten years. The Fund is now a permanent institution; it still raises £23,000 a year: every year at least fifty men in the diocese make as much single-handed. He had other successes. He made peace between Bishop Copleston and the Church Missionary Society; he not only got Parliament to recognise the bishop's veto on ritual prosecutions in practice, he also got Convocation to recognise the bishop's veto on ritual innovations in theory; he carried the majority of the bench with him in voting for the Burial Act of 1880. The Dissenters had persuaded themselves that they wished their own ministers to bury them in the churchyard; the Clergy had persuaded themselves that there would be a liberation meeting in every churchyard over every Dissenter's grave. Happily, the Dissenters hardly ever use the privilege they extorted, which does not exactly vindicate the foresight of Tait. He cared about the questions for which the influential laity cared; his first charge inspired many leading articles; it dealt with the same sort of topics in the same sort of spirit, which was thought a daring attempt to grapple with the realities of life. He always seemed to be dealing sensibly and manfully with questions which he would not understand and could not decide—in the eyes of a public who wished they were not there to decide. His intellectual interests, too, were those of sensible, old-fashioned, influential men. He made a great deal of time for reading, and he spent it on standard books thirty or forty years old. The only important books he seems to have read when they were new were Haeckel, whom he easily dismissed in a spirit of sceptical conservatism; *Supernatural Religion*, which he did not overrate; and *Philochristus*, of which he missed the point, completely overlooking the suggestion that the chief priests sent by night and stole His body to cast it out with the thieves.

The book suggests some general reflections: a Lambeth Conference is very like a Polish Diet; the Anglican Communion still more like the Polish Republic, where confederations to support the Liberum Veto generally succeeded, confederations to suppress it generally failed. The modern Church of London is very like the primitive Church of Corinth; but modern Westminster is very unlike ancient Rome, for in Westminster Archbishops, Presidents of the Council, and Lord Chancellors meet constantly without a wink.

G. A. Simcox.

Intentions. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

Mr. Wilde, in speaking of the methods open to the critic, well says that Mr. Pater's narrative is, of course, only criticism in disguise: his figures are but personifications of certain moods of mind, in which he is for the time interested, and which he desires to express. Now I have been wondering whether one should not, similarly, regard Mr. Wilde essentially as a humorist who has taken art-criticism for his medium, just as Carlyle was a humorist in the odd disguise of a prophet. Certainly, I am inclined to think that much of his intricate tracery of thought and elaborate jewel-work of expression is simply built up to make a casket for one or two clever homeless paradoxes. "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose." Mr. Wilde somehow struck that out, and saw that it was deserving of a better fate than to remain a waif of traditionary epigram; so he went to work on Lamb's strange friend, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, one of the subtlest art-critics and poisoners of his time, unearthed his curious history, made selections from his criticism, and then set his own epigram, diamond-wise, in the midst of a biographical essay. Various readers solemnly add to their historical knowledge, discuss the strange character of the man, study his criticism; but Mr. Wilde sits and watches his epigram sparkling far within. About Wainewright he cares far less than the reader, about his own epigram—far more.

Of course this is not the whole truth about these *Intentions*; the whole truth is a many-coloured thing about a personality so complex as that of the author of *Dorian Gray*. But it is the dominant tendency among many others hardly less powerful. Mr. Wilde's worship of beauty is proverbial, it has made a latter-day myth of him before his time; and yet, at least in these essays, his gift of comic perception is above it, and, rightly viewed, all his "flute-toned" periods are written in the service of the comic muse. Where he is not of malice aforethought humorous, where he seems to be arguing with serious face enough, is it not simply that he may smile behind his mask at the astonishment, not to say terror, of a public he has from the first so delighted in shocking? He loves to hear it call him "dangerous," as some men delight to be called "roué."

There will be many who will, as the phrase is, take him seriously; but let me assure them that Mr. Wilde is not of the number. It all depends what one means by the phrase; for I, for one, take Mr. Wilde very seriously as a creator of work which gives me much and various new pleasure: he is so absolutely alive at every point, so intensely practical—if people could only see it—and therefore so refreshingly unsentimental; he is wittier than is quite fair in a man of his nationality, and he often writes prose that one loves to say over for mere pleasure of ear—his own literary touchstone. The artistic temperament should delight in him, for the serious in the pursuit of literary pleasure he is as serious as every new joy must be; it is only in the domain of thought where it is rather funny to see him taken with such open mouth. Not that Mr. Wilde is not a thinker, and a very subtle one too; but it is rather, so to say, as a damascener of thought, than a forger of it, that he is to be regarded. Of course all things are relative; and to the unsophisticated Ernest of Mr. Wilde's dialogue on "The Critic as Artist" it is certain that the brilliant half-truths with which the sadder and wiser Gilbert lit up their all-night colloquy, as with weird fireworks, were "strange things" and dangerous to the younger man.

"You have told me many strange things to-night, Gilbert. You have told me that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do

it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; you have told me that all art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in the work of art what the artist had not put there; that it is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, and not rational. My friend, you are a dreamer."

Had Ernest read Mr. Pater, to whom Mr. Wilde makes the continual affectionate reference of a disciple, or had he "with a little rod" touched what the Laureate calls the "honey-poison" of France—chanced, for instance, on a passage in which M. Anatole France says that

"la critique est, comme la philosophie et l'histoire, une espèce de roman à l'usage des esprits avisés et curieux, et tout roman, à le bien prendre, est une autobiographie;" and continues, "Le bon critique est celui qui raconte les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre"—

had Ernest been twenty-five instead of presumably nineteen, or had he even at that age possessed a larger measure of the artistic temperament, that night in the Piccadilly library would have lost none of its charm, but it would hardly have been so spiritually dislocating for the poor boy. For the "autobiographical" theory of criticism is no more the secret of M. Anatole France or Mr. Pater than of Mr. Wilde: it belongs to every subtly developed temperament, and has unfortunately been practised in England all too much by men who are anything but subtle. Every small author is eager to give us "les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre;" but exquisite things happen on that quest to few—to Mr. Pater, to Mr. Henry James, occasionally to Mr. Henley, and certainly to Mr. Wilde. He himself does not take Ernest seriously. It is part of the fun of dialogue as a form for criticism, he says, that the critic "can invent an imaginary antagonist and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical argument."

One must not forget that the form is dialogue, and therefore dramatic. Otherwise, we may be inclined to resent some of Gilbert's information, besides missing the subtle pleasure of watching a young innocent soul undergoing initiation. It was for that—among other things—that Mr. Wilde wrote these two "colloquies," as they used to be called, on "The Critic as Artist"; it was not to tell us that creation is as essential a part of criticism as criticism is of creation. All the same, we are glad of the definition of criticism as "a creation within a creation," and of this clear-sighted illustration of its operation.

"The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will serve his purpose. And just as out of the sordid and sentimental amours of the silly wife of a small country doctor in the squalid village of Souville l'Abbaye, near Rouen, Gustave Flaubert was able to create a classic, and make a masterpiece of style, so, from subjects of little or no importance . . . the true critic can, if it be his pleasure so to direct or waste his faculty of contemplation, produce work that will be flawless in beauty and instinct with intellectual subtlety."

Mr. Wilde is speaking of criticism in its highest form, in the same sense as Matthew Arnold spoke of poetry as "a criticism of life." Of the humbler form of it known as reviewing, he makes one or two common-sense remarks—

"As a rule," he says, "the critics . . . are far more cultured than the people whose work they are called upon to review. This is, indeed, only what one would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation does. . . . The poor reviewers are apparently reduced to be the reporters of the police courts of literature, the chroniclers of the doings of the habitual criminals of art. It is sometimes said of them that they do not read all through the works they are called upon to criticise. They do not; or, at least, they should not. . . . Nor is it necessary. To know the vintage and quality of a wine one need not drink the whole cask."

It belongs to Mr. Wilde's paradoxical method that he should continually play on the convertibility of terms. Thus, the whole contention of his essays on criticism is that criticism and creation are essentially one and the same, or, at least, that they necessarily dovetail one into the other; and yet towards the end of this essay we find Gilbert saying "it is certain that the subject-matter at the disposal of creation is always diminishing, while the subject-matter of criticism increases daily." Here we have the two terms crystallised once more to their hard and fast everyday meaning, while all through they have been used as convertible. This is apt to bewilder. As a rule, however, Mr. Wilde gains his effects by adhering to the concrete signification of words. This reduces some of his contentions to a mere question of terms. One often feels: Now, if that word were but changed for another, for which it really stands, there would be nothing further to say. But that, of course, would not do for Mr. Wilde, nor, indeed, for us, to whom, presumably, subject is nought and treatment is all. Occasionally, by this means, it follows that Mr. Wilde seems to beg the question; as, for instance, in his remarks on morality in art. When he says, "All art is immoral," he is using the word in its narrow relative sense; he does not mean by it the same as those who use it seriously against certain schools and forms of art: though they say "immoral" they mean "unspiritual," and that is the meaning many people will attach to the word in Mr. Wilde's phrase. They will thus be quite unnecessarily shocked by a mere quibble of words, and their real position is left unassailed; the real question at issue being whether or not there is certain art which is dangerous to the spirit, of which one should feel as Mr. Pater says in *Marius*: "This is what I may not look at." If life be really a struggle between higher and lower, if art is anything more than a form of sensuous indulgence, this is a question to be answered. Mr. Wilde does not leave us quite clear as to his side in the matter, though he seems to lay over-much stress on the sensuous side of art, a side which is, after all, external and impossible without an informing, formative soul. He echoes, too, Gautier's tirades against "virtue," and Mr. Swinburne's

"What ailed us, oh gods, to desert you
For the creeds that refuse and restrain?"

and says hard things of chastity and self-sacrifice—really a very "young" and quite illogical position in an age which has accepted evolution. He quotes M. Renan to the effect that "Nature cares little about chastity"; but does that prove anything save that Nature is always behind the age, as Mr. Wilde tells us in another place? Surely it is by such ideals, of which, once seen, the beauty haunts him through all his sinnings, that man evolves at all, striving and failing and striving, till slowly what was once the ideal becomes the instinct.

But I am not recking my own rede, and am in danger of growing quite "heated," as they say of politicians, while Mr. Wilde is doubtless smiling in his sleeve.

Let us leave contention and enjoy. I have referred to two or three of the interesting qualities in these papers. They are so absolutely alive. Every sentence is full of brain. There is no padding, no vagueness, all is "thought out," as the painters say. One has that safe, untroubled feeling in reading that Matthew Arnold's calm dissecting method gives us—though, needless to say, the austerity of the *Essays in Criticism* is a very different thing from this luxuriously coloured prose: however difficult the thesis, we leave it to the writer with perfect confidence that he will speedily make all clear. Mr. Wilde has, indeed, a rare power of keeping his eye steadily "on the object." It is doubtless, too, a part of his perversity that while, as we have seen, he will, when it suits him, adhere rigidly to the fixed signification of words, he can at other times exercise a quite remarkable power of reducing them to their elements, of remorselessly forcing them to say what they really mean. "You must not be frightened by words," said Gilbert to his young neophyte; and certainly, if you set such words as "unpractical," "dangerous," or "dreamer" on to Mr. Wilde they will come in for the same summary dissection that befel the lion which attacked the strong man in Holy Writ.

Mr. Wilde's delight in words for their own sake is quite Rabelaisian. He loves so to spread them in heaps, like a child bathing its hands in rich, many-coloured beads, that sometimes he is in danger of a lack of proportion, and catalogues that remind us of the Whitmanese. But some of his tapestries in which, in a brief pageant, he shows us again the Trojan war, or Dante threading the circles of his great dream, are beautiful; and in passages such as the following his technical knowledge of artistic methods, especially handicraft, give us a sense of surefootedness, a pre-Raphaelite distinction of impression very quickening to the imagination:

"The sculptor hewed from the marble block the great white-limbed Hermes that slept within it. The waxers and gilders of images gave tone and texture to the statue, and the world, when it saw it, worshipped and wa

demanding with so many touches of social satire, furnish quite a collection of recognisable types, all of which are filled in with more or less cleverness by the various performers.

carefully loooked up our French history, will remember to have been signalised by pomp, extravagance, and luxury of every description. Magnificent are the stuffs, and the brocades, and the [illegible] having

N° 3319, JUNE 6, '91

OUR LIBRARY TABLE.

IN spite of his showy paradoxes, Mr. Oscar Wilde, in his volume of essays called *Intentions* (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.), succeeds in proving that he has something to say, and it is a pity that he should think, or find, it necessary to resort to the tricks of the smart advertiser in order to attract attention to his wares. He runs the risk of making his readers throw down his book in disgust, and he spoils his style by making it mechanical. To call Mr. Wilde's favourite rhetorical figure by the name of paradox is really too complimentary; he carries his joke too far, and makes paradox ridiculous. The form of language in which he chooses to conceal his thoughts is easily described. His method is this: he takes some well-established truth, something in which the wisdom of centuries and the wit of the greatest men have concurred, and asserts the contrary; then he whittles his assertion down, and when at his best arrives at the point which might have been reached by starting at the other end. Piquant at first, but soon wearisome, his method does sometimes succeed in that illumination of the commonplace which constitutes originality. The first essay, called 'The Decay of Lying' (which means the growth of realism), is by far the cleverest. Here Mr. Wilde, in the intervals of his labour over paradoxes and self-contradictions, has spared time to think for himself. In speaking of writers about art Mr. Ruskin must, of course, be left in the place which he incontestably occupies by himself. But speaking of lesser people, after "Vernon Lee" hardly any one has a better claim than Mr. Wilde to be named as a contributor of something fresh, something original and stimulating, amongst the mass of matter about art that has been written during the last twenty years. Next to 'The Decay of Lying' comes a paper on Wainewright the poisoner, which is not much above the ordinary level of magazine padding, and then Mr. Wilde returns to art matters. In two essays on 'The Critic as Artist' his besetting habit holds the mastery over him, and the reader becomes heartily weary of it. Making every allowance for Mr. Wilde's tiresome way of expressing himself, one cannot extract anything of much value from these two papers. In the 118 pages which they occupy Mr. Wilde has attempted to make sense of a number of propositions such as these:—that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; that all art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than creation, and so on. He is at times naturally driven to desperate assertions. He says that ordinary people have a glib, ignorant way of saying, "Why should we read what is written about Shakspeare and Milton? We can read the plays and the poems. That is enough." The obvious truth is, of course, that ordinary people say and do just the reverse. And ordinary people, too, who write spend their labour in writing about literature instead of labouring to write literature. Again, what can Mr. Wilde have been thinking of, except effect, when he said that bad artists always admire each other's work, as a summary of his theory that good ones do otherwise? Had he forgotten his Vasari and the evidence of the golden age of the great Italian artists? His statement that "to the æsthetic temperament the vague is always repellent" is almost as reckless. When he speaks of Matthew Arnold's definition of "literature" as a criticism of life he is worse than reckless. When he speaks of the Caffè Florian at Venice as "Florio's," of the author of the 'Ode to Evening' as Collin, and of Wainewright's being in "goal," he shows, perhaps, that strict accuracy is beneath him. But these are trifles. No one can read Mr. Wilde's book without being convinced of the strong ability which he does so much to hide, and without hoping that he has now sufficiently sown his [illegible] will some day devote himself to writing something more solid and reasonable and not less brilliant than 'Intentions.'

NOVELS OF THE WEEK.

The Picture of Dorian Gray. By Oscar Wilde. (Ward, Lock & Co.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde's paradoxes are less wearisome when introduced into the chatter of society than when he rolls them off in the course of his narrative. Some of the conversation in his novel is very smart, and while reading it one has the pleasant feeling, not often to be enjoyed in the company of modern novelists, of being entertained by a person of decided ability. The idea of the book may have been suggested by Balzac's 'Peau de Chagrin,' and it is none the worse for that. So much may be said for 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' but no more, except, perhaps, that the author does not appear to be in earnest. For the rest, the book is [illegible] (though not exactly what is called "improper"), and tedious.

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, and other Stories. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde's little book of stories is capital. They are delightfully humorous, witty, and fresh, sparkling with good things, full of vivacity, and well put together. 'The Canterville Ghost' is a first-rate ghost story, told partly from the point of view of the ghost himself—a most refreshing novelty—and partly from that of the American family who have bought the ancestral home of the Cantervilles. 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' is a very good story, too, told in a vein of [illegible] distinctive. These two pieces will bear reading aloud, a decidedly severe test.

A House of Pomegranates. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

The adornment of these "beautiful tales," as Mr. Wilde modestly calls them, has been entrusted to Messrs. C. Ricketts and C. H. Shannon, and for combined ugliness and obscurity it would be hard, we imagine, to beat them. The full-page illustrations are so indistinctly printed that whatever excellence they may possess is lost to view, while the grotesque black-and-white woodcuts are hideous to behold. It is, perhaps, as well that the book is not meant for the "British Child"; for it would certainly make him scream, according to his disposition, with terror or amusement.

N° 3513, Feb. 23, '95

Mr. Morell's curious experiment of producing 'An Ideal Husband' at five o'clock in the afternoon proved so far a success that the more fashionable parts of the house were filled. One difficulty presents itself to ladies who at the close of the entertainment wish to dine at half-past seven or eight in some central spot, hotel or other, in London, namely, the necessity of returning home to dress.

24 N° 3322, JUNE 27, '91

NOVELS OF THE WEEK.

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113 N° 3352, JAN. 23, '92

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, and other Stories. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde's little book of stories is capital. They are delightfully humorous, witty, and fresh, sparkling with good things, full of vivacity, and well put together. 'The Canterville Ghost' is a first-rate ghost story, told partly from the point of view of the ghost himself—a most refreshing novelty—and partly from that of the American family who have bought the ancestral home of the Cantervilles. 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' is a very good story, too, told in a vein of drollery which is quite distinctive. These two pieces will bear reading aloud, a decidedly severe test.

177 N° 3354, FEB. 6, '92

A House of Pomegranates. By Oscar Wilde. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)

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57 N° 3507, JAN. 12, '95

DRAMA

THE WEEK.

HAYMARKET.—'An Ideal Husband,' Comedy in Four Acts. By Oscar Wilde.

ONE of the constituent elements in wit is the perception of analogies in things apparently disparate and incongruous. Accepting this as a canon and testing by it the pretensions of Mr. Oscar Wilde in his latest play, that writer might be pronounced the greatest of wits, inasmuch as he perceives analogies in things absolutely antagonistic. His presumable end is gained, since a chorus of laughter attends his propositions or paradoxes. It requires, however, gifts of a kind not usually accorded to humanity to think out statements such as "High intellectual pleasures make girls' noses large," "Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast," "All reasons are absurd," and the like. Uttered as these things are by Mr. Charles Hawtrey, who for once is entrusted with *fadaises* instead of fibs, they pass muster and create amusement, and it is not until one turns to them again that one perceives how impertinent and extravagant they are. As parts of the trapping of a vigorously ridden hobby-horse of affectation, they beget amusement rather than offence. It is difficult to be angry with the author or displeased with his play. 'An Ideal Husband' has a certain amount of story, the development of which proves not uninteresting. Accident is too potent a factor in the action to permit of its being genuinely dramatic. Without the aid of *ficelles* the required termination could never have been reached. When reached even it is wholly disproportionate to what the author holds to be the offence, and a man whom Mr. Wilde sets before the audience as a traitor and a scoundrel escapes with no worse penalty than a fright and with one of the most coveted of human rewards. Nothing, in fact, beyond a curious complication is brought about by human folly. Separate scenes and characters are amusing and interesting, and the whole, with the salt of Mr. Wilde's impertinence, wins acceptance. The scenes and costumes are exquisite, and much of the acting is praiseworthy. Mr. Hawtrey and Mr. Brookfield, the latter as a servant, are seen to most advantage in a cast that comprised Mr. Waller, Mr. Bishop, Miss Fanny Brough, Miss Florence West, Miss Vane Featherston, Miss Maude Millett, and Miss Helen Forsyth.

In 'Thyrza Fleming' Miss Dorothy Leighton deals, with apparent openness, with a subject indicated in 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' and in 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' Her hero espouses the daughter of a woman with whom he has had relations which are described as "close," but are discreetly left undefined. We have not yet gone so far back to the antique world as to contemplate such matters with pleasure, or even with equanimity, and the play, though accepted with respect and even pleasure by the select and much-enduring patrons of the Independent Theatre, would scarcely be relished by a general public. Mr. Bernard Gould and Miss Winifred Fraser played in it as the mated lovers, the mother rival of her daughter being presented by Miss Esther Palliser, who shows histrionic possibilities as yet wholly undeveloped.

260 N° 3513. FEB. 23, '95

DRAMA

THE WEEK.

ST. JAMES'S.—'The Importance of being Earnest,' a Pl in Three Acts. By Oscar Wilde.

THE mantle of Mr. Gilbert has fallen o the shoulders of Mr. Oscar Wilde, wh wears it in jauntiest fashion. Not on gleam of sense or sanity is there in th piece, which he paradoxically describes a a trivial comedy for serious people, and o which, in sheer wantonness of contempt fo his public, he has bestowed the punnin title of 'The Importance of being Earnest Ernest, it may be said in explanation, is th assumed name under which two character woo successfully two maidens. When thei right to the name is shown to be non existent their hold upon their respective fai ones is imperilled, and they have to us strenuous exertions to obtain a semblance o right to a baptismal appellation not bestowe on them in conventional fashion at thei birth. Hence the genesis of a title not mor preposterous than the piece. Nothing, per haps, shows more clearly or convincingl the magical influence exercised by the foot lights than the success of Mr. Wilde's play which was received with delight. Stage dia monds to be effective must be paste; on th stage tinsel is better than gold; and chemica preparations enhance, if they do not eclipse the bloom of youth and beauty. It almos seems as if the same law applied to dialogue Nowhere except on the stage would a bein supposed to be reasonable make a governes tell her pupil to study for an hour politica economy; but to omit as too exciting th depreciation of the rupee, or an aristocrati

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lady declare that what the age suffers from is want of principle and want of profile. Many of Mr. Wilde's jokes are mere flippant perversions of known phrases, as "What is the use of the lower classes unless they set us a good example?" or "Divorces are made in heaven." One is inclined on hearing these things to say with Touchstone, "I'll *joke* you so eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping-hours excepted." Take a few proverbs, transpose them ever so slightly, throw in a dash of cynicism, and if possible a flavour of alliteration, and the thing is done. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" may thus become "A virtuous woman is a curse to her household." Your public will roar with laughter, and you will be accepted as a wit. Here is, as Sir Walter says, "the trick." Severely as H. J. Byron was condemned for the jokes and verbal quibbles he dragged by head and shoulders into his plays, these were the height of wit compared to the mixture of paradox and persiflage now given. To say that a crew of bibulous mariners in frequent conflict with the law were known as the leaky boats, because they had to be so frequently bailed out, is more brilliant than to say that truth is never pure and never simple. Yet frivolous, saucy, and impertinent as Mr. Wilde's dialogue is, and uncharacteristic also, since every personage in the drama says the same things, it is, in a way, diverting. The audience laughs consumedly, and the critic, even should he chafe, which is surely superfluous, laughs also in spite of himself. There is, moreover, a grave serenity of acquiescence in the most monstrous propositions that is actually and highly humorous. In the opening scene Algernon Moncrieffe, the occupant of fashionable chambers in Piccadilly, says to his servant, "Lane, I dined here yesterday, Mr. Worthing and Mr. —— (the other name doesn't matter), and we drank, I find, eight bottles of champagne." "Eight bottles and a pint, sir." "How comes it, Lane, that the servants drink more in bachelors' chambers than in private houses?" "I think, sir, because the wines are better. You *do* get some very poor wine in private houses nowadays." This, or something like it, is said with a seriousness and aplomb that are genuinely diverting. A man, in fact, does not hit public taste unless he has capacity or gift of some kind. It is easy to find fault with Mr. Wilde's latest piece. It is, indeed, difficult to do anything else. A tendency to resentment at the low estimate put on the judgment of those for whom the writer caters is conceivable. It is, however, easier, and perhaps more advantageous, to laugh. Few opportunities are afforded the actors, but of these the most is made. Mr. Alexander's acting in farce has a sort of air of pensive protest which is effective. Misses Rose Leclercq, Irene Vanbrugh, and Millard, Mr. Aynesworth, and Mr. Kinsey Peile were seen to advantage.

"Lady Windermere's Fan."

THE same words may be said of "Lady Windermere's Fan." It can scarcely be regarded as a serious contribution to the drama. It gained a kind of notoriety from the conduct of the author; it deserved its measure of success from the excellence of much of the acting. Miss Marion Terry never played so well as she played as Mrs. Erlynne. Mr. Alexander chose a small part, and made it, as far as acting could, a work of art. Mr. Ben Webster, whose success in "The Plowdens" I have already saluted, made his first marked success as Cecil Grahame. It was not the smartness of the cynicism which he had to utter which made the part a success, but a vitality, a sense of characterisation, a genuine creative power in Mr. Webster's performance which at once marked for him a signal advance in his art. It would really seem as if Mr. Webster were one of the coming men; he is certainly one of the very first, if not the first, in his own immediate rank of young players. So the piece has rendered, as it were unawares, a service to that dramatic interpretation of which its author has said so many absurd things.

MR. OSCAR WILDE is inclined to be peevish with his critics. Yet his critics were very patient with him. He wrote what he called a play, and he peppered it with not unamiable paradox, and diverted a considerable number of persons. But it takes more than this to convert an adventurous Bœotian into the ideal blend of, let us say, Goethe, Shakspeare, and Baffo, which appears to be Mr. Wilde's own image of himself. Mr. Wilde has in his time aroused the gaiety of English-speaking countries. It delights him—as the performance delights the spectators—to masque as an Athenian. But he is no Athenian. George Meredith brands one of his creations as "An Epicurean whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his Garden." The Athenians would not have been tolerant of this sham Athenian. Mr. Wilde seems most to resemble the man in Charles de Bernard's ablest novel, who always had Art upon his lips because he had so little in his soul. Mr. Wilde has called his play a work of art. That of course it is not, could not be. Mr. Wilde is many things needless to enumerate, but he is not an artist. His utterances upon art must be regarded with a delicate disdain.

JUSTIN HUNTLY McCARTHY.

expect from you. It has been resolved to limit the individual subscription to ten guineas." Ten guineas! Our first thought was to send ten shillings—a sum which far exceeds the love which we bore the reverend doctor. Then, after more mature reflection, our resolution fails us; we dare not have the courage of our opinions, and we are by no means cheerful givers of the cheque which finally swells the list of the doctor's admirers. Why should we have given anything at all? Why should we weakly accede to the request of a friend who solicits aid on behalf of an institution for decayed Punch-and-Judy men? We may have no interest in these unfortunate gentlemen; we may even regard their exhibition as an extremely immoral one; and yet we give, simply because that friend who importunes us on their behalf is one who will not be denied. Nobody but a very rich man likes to be considered illiberal, and it is a cowardly disinclination to incur that charge which prompts our generosity in most of these instances. Certainly it would be a great comfort on these occasions to be able to refer the applicants to a "Social Demands Insurance Company," and to inform them that all our charity is done through its agency,—for there would be no need to give them any further information as to whether our yearly subscription to the said institution was fifty pounds or fifty shillings. Unfortunately, the facetious suggestion of the writer in the *Times* is not capable of realisation; though we admit with sorrow that it is just as likely to be realised as a change in our way of thought. Society will still go on levying blackmail, and we shall still continue to pay it meekly, however much we may grumble at the infliction.

OSCAR WILDE'S COMEDY.

WE shall not be suspected of any great sympathy with the methods and the feats of Mr. Oscar Wilde. In this journal we have always disclaimed respect for the forms of charlatanism in which it has pleased him to indulge, and which he would, we suspect, be about the first himself to admit. But a charlatan may be a man of conspicuous ability; and on the withdrawal from the stage for the present of his first-acted comedy, after a career of great success, it is but appropriate in us as it is fair to him to signalise the addition to our acted plays of a comedy of society-manners pure and simple which may fairly claim its place among the recognised names in that almost extinct class of drama. We have, indeed, too much amongst us of Ibsen and his parallels not to note it with satisfaction. We can ourselves find nothing in *A Doll's House* beyond a fairly interesting domestic drama, with a story and characters which are nothing if not old, a kind of Martin Chuzzlewit married to Dora Copperfield, and a type of such very old-fashioned heredity as belongs to a gentleman who has the gout because his father drank; and we are grateful to Mr. Wilde for a straightforward comedy which professes no purpose but comedy's best and truest,—to entertain. A reproduction of contemporary "polite conversation" after the manner which we noticed long since in reviewing a republication of Swift, and which Sheridan idealised in the *School for Scandal*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, as a specimen of true comedy, is a head and shoulders above any of its contemporaries for some years syne. It has nothing in common with farcical comedy, with didactic comedy, or the "literary" comedy of which we have heard so much of late from disappointed authors, whose principal claim to literature appears to consist in being undramatic. It is a distinguishing note of Mr. Wilde that he has condescended to leave his business, and has written a workmanlike play as well as a good comedy. Without that it would be worthless, and how much he may owe to his manager's skill and help, according to another endless controversy, lies between those two, and concerns us not. If Mr. Alexander is as helpful as he is modest, it may be much. For the character of Lord Windermere affords him little opportunity of personal distinction. Indeed, the peculiarity as well as the weakness of the play consists in the fact that the interest lies entirely with two women,—as well acted as they well could be.

The story, for those who have not seen it, lies in a nutshell. We regret the disappearance of the old method of publication, for *Lady Windermere* would be worth reading. Lord Windermere has married for love a young lady whose mother they suppose dead, but she turns up in the guise of a *divorcée* of some notoriety in society, and Lord Windermere submits to be blackmailed in order to conceal the fact from his wife, and pays her many sums of money. The object of this Mrs. Erlynne, as she calls herself, is, like the heroine of *Forget-me-not*, to regain a place in society, and she gets an invitation to a ball given by Lady Windermere, who, meanwhile, has been informed by some good-natured friends of the gossip of society about her husband and Mrs. Erlynne, whose appearance at the ball causes a sensation. Outraged in her feelings, Lady Windermere leaves a note to wish her lord good-bye, and flies to the rooms of an admirer, a certain Lord Darlington. Thither Mrs. Erlynne, who intercepts the letter, follows to save her daughter, for whom her heart and better feelings are thus suddenly aroused. Determined to save her at any cost, she takes upon herself the ownership of an accusing fan, her husband's gift, which, on the rooms being invaded by a circle of men, he being one of them, she mislays in a room she hides in. In again losing herself, Mrs. Erlynne thus saves her daughter, who at the end is thoroughly reconciled with the husband who really loves her; while Mrs. Erlynne finds a husband in an adoring lordling, and leaves England, where she never knows "whether the fogs cause the depressed people, or the depressed people cause the fogs," the secret of her relationship to the heroine remaining a secret still.

It will be seen that there is nothing new in the old story which has more or less framed half the comedies of intrigue which fine-folk comedy has so freely inspired. But the novelty of drama lies in treatment; and while there is no suggestion of coarseness in Mr. Wilde's play, there is plenty both of good feeling and of complex character, while there is opportunity for good acting, which is plentifully used. Miss Winifred Emery plays Lady Windermere with a charm and skill which has placed her quite in the front rank amongst our emotional actresses, the more remarkable because she was not the first representative of the part. Her acting suggests both heart and brains, and most effective is the contrast which she supplies with Miss Marian Terry, who, if not a little overshadowed by the fame of her elder sister, would bear even a better stage-name than she does. To those who remember the eldest and earliest Kate, she brings many curious shades of association. These old stage-families, to which both the Terrys and the Emerys belong, have singular aristocracies of their own, which, with a Gray or Webster at their side, it is curious to contrast with the Vane Tempests and Nutcombe Goulds, who bring new blood of another kind into the theatrical ranks. Mr. Gould is a quite remarkable figure in the comedy for bearing and breeding, combined with quiet force and skill. Indeed, the whole cast is in its manner as noteworthy as the play. Mr. Wilde's dialogue, which is the chief feature of the comedy—as, given the essentials, of course it should be—is throughout conveyed with point and appreciation. The genial and *blasé* tone which modern society of the special class affects is as admirably caught and sustained as were the would-be smartnesses of Miss Neveroul and her friends in Swift's *Polite Conversation*. All the close observation and thought which the comedy-writer requires Mr. Wilde has brought to bear upon the "puppets" with whom, in his capacity of advertising author, he has waged newspaper-war, and his puppets have repaid him in kind. If his Duchess is rather trying, it is more because she indulges in certain odd circular sweeps with her arm which nobody could possibly perform in a drawing-room, than because duchesses are supposed to be unlike other people. In conversational respects, they are perhaps as "much of a muchness" as Mr. Wilde makes them. The way in which she secures a fresh young Australian for her meek daughter, who is sent out of the way to inspect photographs, or to look at the moon, whenever her mother proposes to talk scandal, and her delightful summaries of the male sex, who "grow old, but never grow good," and are brutes who only want to be cooked for, are very amusing stage-talk to listen to. Another refreshing element in the play is the entire absence of the stage-servant, who seems so terrible a necessity in comedy. We all know what use even Sheridan made of them, amusing as that was. And to find nothing but a man-servant and maid-servant, who do just what they are engaged for, their business and no more, is a piece of "realism" in the right direction. Indeed, the whole comedy, its plan and its writing, its people and its dresses, its colouring and its tone, deserve, as we think, these lines of record from us on its withdrawal from the boards, as an unique specimen in our day—as far as we know, absolutely

THE MORNING POST,

AN ADVENTUROUS AUTHOR.

BY ANDREW LANG.

No publisher ever posed to me as a moral mentor. None ever offered to collaborate with me, as Blackwood did with Sir Walter Scott, whose reply is unpublishable in this modest column. None ever wanted to swear eternal friendship with me at first sight, though, to be sure, a publisher (not British) did lately invite me to write a book on the Life and Adventures of Mr. Oscar Wilde. Had the publisher

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Mr. Oscar Wilde is said to have been discovered not long since, pencil in hand, pondering thoughtfully over a type-written copy of his play, *A Woman of No Importance*. A friend came upon him and inquired the nature of the task with which he was occupied. "I am seeing whether it is possible to alter or omit anything in this play—and yet," he reflectively added, "who am I that I should venture to tamper with a work of such genius!" That, of course, was a very nice point. Some one whom Mr. Wilde did not know claimed acquaintance with him the other day, and, perceiving that he was not recognised, feebly remarked, "You don't recollect me, I am afraid?" "I remember your name, perfectly—but I cannot recall your face," was the reply; and that, too, wants thinking about.

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In last Tuesday's agony column of the *Times* there appeared the advertisement of a clergyman who was anxious to obtain a pulpit for Whit-Sunday, when he wished to deliver a sermon on *Hypatia*. It was kindly meant, of course, and shows the useful influence of the Church and State Guild; but the clerical puff of the late Haymarket play came nearly a month too late. If, however, the reverend gentleman could get a pulpit in which to discourse of *A Woman of no Importance*, he might do a very useful little bit of *réclame*.

[illegible] and revolutionise society at large by sublime self-sacrifice. There are two sides to every question, and Mr. Oscar Wilde's piety in social reform has not as yet been urged by anybody. His attitude has been so extraordinary

left Oxford and won the Newdigate with my poem on 'Ravenna' been wholly intelligible. And I have never been found out." Thus might argue Mr. Oscar Wilde in his own defence. Meanwhile, society at large will rush to see his play.

unique—apart from all questions of its merits and demerits, of the comedy of fine-life manners. Since the club scene in *Money*, there has been no simply "man's scene" so clearly marked as that in Lord Darlington's chambers. Otherwise, Lord Lytton's favourite sentimentalities in *Money* interfere with it woefully as a comedy-picture. Not the least pleasant reminiscence to playgoers, in connection with *Lady Windermere's Fan*, will be the very amusing skit which it evoked at another comedy theatre, under the title of *The Poet and the Puppets*. As a thoroughly good-humoured piece of burlesque, not so much on the play as on the eccentricities and methods of the well-known author, it has not often been beaten. Not the least amusing reminiscence, on the other hand, will be the ferocious wrath which, on its first appearance, the play provoked among the regular stage-critics, almost to a man. Except that Mr. Wilde smoked a cigarette when called on, it is difficult to see why,—unless it was because the comedy ran off the beaten track, which is just what they are always deprecating.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—The most significant item of the American elections of November 8th, so far as enduring political lessons, and not mere temporary interests, are concerned, is the terrific effect of the secret ballot, under which three-fourths of the States voted, most of them for the first time. It instantly reduces the controlling party of the United States—with nearly half the voters, more than half the States, three-fourths of the wealth, and probably as large a part of the ability—to a mere New England faction, plus a scattered State here and there over the country, without a future, and without any distinctive bases for a future except those the country has twice beaten into ruin.

This could not happen, and did not happen, to a party all of whose members supported it voluntarily. It seems certain that at least a hundred thousand men—eliminating recent acts and local issues—have for years wished to desert the party, but were held to it by the tremendous weapon of social opprobrium, added to actual intimidation and the fear of ruinous disfavour in business. No one who has not lived there can appreciate the moral courage it takes to turn open Democrat in a tribe-bound Republican community; to turn Catholic in a Protestant one is really a light thing in comparison. The party has, in fact, for years been like a corpse in a mound, retaining the form of man only by excluding the outer air.

But the conclusion I wish to enforce is that, for good or evil, the secret ballot emancipates the masses wholly from the power of the upper few; either the power to plunder, or the power to coerce into accepting political guidance. In this case, it enables them to escape from keeping a party dominated by great manufacturing interests to rob them shamelessly under pretext of giving them back more in wages and social comfort; in another aspect, it certainly takes the controlling power from the ablest, most courageous, and most independent class, and gives it to the more timid and inefficient. Yet, again, no community is made up of moral heroes, and the change makes the majority their own real masters. The *Spectator* thinks it "monstrous" that a man should have power he is too cowardly to exercise in public. May I say, on the other side, I think it monstrous that the chance of heredity should enable a master who is ten times a coward to do as he will without risking a meal, while his underling risks beggary for his family if he refuses to be a political serf? The upper classes are largely open, not because they have more courage than the lower, but because they can afford to be, and because they were born to a place in which they could afford to be. I deny that I (for example) am more a coward than my neighbour because he has £10,000 a year in stocks, and I have only my salary; and I think it unfair that I should be called a coward for not liking to be a martyr, while he is lauded as a hero for doing as he pleases when he has nothing to fear. At all events, this election shows that no privileged class can be built up by indirection under a secret ballot, and that it can be under either an open ballot or a *viva voce* system. This, independently of the question whether such a class is a good thing to have.—I am, Sir, &c.,

Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A. Forrest Morgan.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRIVACY.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—While acknowledging the general truth of the remarks in "The Privilege of Privacy," in the *Spectator* of the 19th inst., I feel bound, in the interest of others, to take exception to the particular instance upon which the article is founded. In common with many others in this parish, I feel that a grave injustice has been done in the publication of a letter written by an insane girl, in which the reputation of several persons is seriously attacked. There is absolutely no evidence to show that she had been exposed to any annoyance in the neighbourhood in which she resided, except such as arose occasionally from the rudeness of a few rough boys who play in the street, certainly without any idea of persecution. The clergyman who said at the inquest that the girl's mind had only too probably become unhinged by such trouble, is a Baptist minister. The clergy of the parish would never have ventured on such a statement, which they believe cannot be substantiated; and they feel that a great injustice has been done both to the neighbourhood in which the girl lived, and to those whose names have been so unadvisedly published in the letter of one who was clearly insane, and therefore not responsible for the damage she might do to the reputation of innocent persons.—I am, Sir, &c., George Dunlop, Vicar of Knowle.

REITERATION IN PREACHING.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—A confirmation by an "Evangelist" from practical experience of your view in the *Spectator* of November 19th, may be of interest. The writer has been in intimate contact with many or most of the successful Evangelists in England, within and without the Established Church, as also with those in America and on the Continent; and, so far as he is aware, they all repeat the same addresses from year to year, some of them through the whole course of their ministry. I remember the remark being made: "Mr. Moody still preaches the 'Daniel sermon' that he has preached for twenty-five years."

Out of a number of addresses, a speaker finds a proportion which produce certain results; and if he is wise, he will drop the less effective ones, and repeat certainly those more effective. Each repetition makes them more clear and pointed, both in expression and illustration. The familiarity with them leaves him at more mental liberty to concentrate his attention on his hearers, and to use those oratorical adjuncts which increase the effectiveness of speaking. More earnestness and emphasis can be thrown into an address which, from its familiarity to the speaker, requires less mental effort in the arrangement of thought.

What success the writer has had with multitudes in every country, from Oregon to Berlin, he attributes largely to having laid aside the personal gratification of variety of composition, and to having confined himself to the repetition to fresh audiences of those addresses which he has found most effective in definite results. It is the general experience of the Evangelist that his own subjective experience, at the time of delivery, is no measure of the effect produced. The times when he most deeply feels a sense of mechanical repetition and failure and humiliation, are often those of most manifest success, judged by the results; while elation and joy in giving his message are often accompanied by the smallest impression on his audience.—I am, Sir, &c.,

London, November 19th. Evangelist.

THE EXTENT OF OUR RIGHTS OVER ANIMALS.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—It is much to be regretted that men cannot discuss a difficult question without abuse and ridicule. What is demanded of us is,—have we a right to inflict excruciating tortures upon unoffending animals in order to relieve human diseases, which have their seat in the brain, as the result, in nine cases out of ten, of neglect or violation of natural laws? Animals have their rights as well as men. We all agree that we have dominion over them, so far as to use them for food, for clothing, and for help in our labour. But does the claim extend to experiments of the most cruel kind which professedly lead to results that would be better reached by slower and more trustworthy observation of the human patient?

These tortures, inflicted upon our companions and fellow-heirs of earth, have been justified by the dictum that "the law of sacrifice is the law of life;" but surely the value of all

that I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. possible that he may have said to himself, "I will show you and prove to you to what an extent bad manners are not only recognised but endorsed in this wholly free and unrestrained age. I will do on the stage of a public theatre what I should not dare do at a mass meeting in the Park. I will uncover my

OUR PORTRAITS.

We are indebted to Messrs. Fradelle and Young, 246, Regent Street, for our portrait of the late Sir George Campbell; to Messrs. Manll and Fox, 187A, Piccadilly, for that of the late Mr. H. W. Bates; to Messrs. Elliott and Fry, 55, Baker Street, for that of the late Lord Justice Cotton; and to Messrs. Downey, of Ebury Street, for that of Mr. Oscar Wilde.

The latest addition to the noble company of playwrights is Mr. Oscar Wilde, whose very successful début in his new rôle was awaited by many with as much curiosity as interest. Just now, too, all Paris is on the *qui vive* for his play of "Salomé," founded on sacred history, and written solely and originally in French by this most versatile of geniuses, though whether or no he is to reap fresh laurels thereby remains to be seen. Mr. Oscar Wilde is, as everyone knows, the younger son of Sir William Wilde, the celebrated Irish oculist; and of his clever wife, whose *nom de guerre* of "Speranza" will be well remembered by all who have any cognisance or recollection of the Young Ireland movement, but who of late years has turned her attention more to folk-lore than to politics. Mr. Wilde's career has been a varied and a brilliant succession of *tableaux vivants*, so to speak, from the commencement, as winner of the Newdigate at Oxford and leader of the then infantile æsthetic craze, to his present semi-public position as lecturer, man of fashion, wit, poet, novelist, essayist, and dramatist all in one. His lecturing tour in America was literally a species of royal progress, even "God Save the Queen" being played to mark his entry into a ball-room. Perhaps his most remarkable attribute, after his mastery of paradox and skill in epigram, is the imperturbable and courtly serenity which characterises his every speech and action. Mr. Wilde was married, some eight years ago, to Miss Constance Lloyd, daughter of Mr. Horace Lloyd, and is the father of two very beautiful boys. His house in Tite Street, Chelsea, was decorated by the late Mr. Godwin, and is, with its subtle harmonies of green and blue, its peacock-like charm of colouring, and quaint, old-world furniture, strangely in consonance with the spirit of modern art and its somewhat *fin-de-siècle* occupier.

Mr. Oscar Wilde.

A very full and, on the whole, admiring house greeted the production of Mr. Oscar Wilde's play ("Lady Windermere's Fan") at the St. James's Theatre the other evening, and never did audience at a *première* appear less brilliantly attired. It may be that the stage dresses, which certainly were miracles of fine colour and distinction, threw everything else a little into the shade; it may be that the recent sad necessity for mourning garments has pushed aside the instinct for pretty gowns. Certainly, with few exceptions the feminine portion of the assemblage was gowned wisely, maybe, but decidedly not too well. However, there were bright spots here and there. Mrs. Bram Stoker wore a wonderful evening wrap of striped brocade with "thousand rare encolourings." Mrs. Oscar Wilde looked charming in her pale-blue brocaded gown, made after the fashion of Charles the First's time, with its long tabbed bodice, slashed sleeves, and garniture of old lace and pearls. Mrs. Jopling-Rowe was becomingly arrayed in shrimp-pink, lightly accented with black. Some of the other wearers of pleasing toilettes were Mrs. Pinero, Miss Julia Neilson, and Miss Florence Terry. Among those present were Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Campbell-Praed, Mr. Bancroft, Mrs. Hare, Mr. Charles Matthews, Mr. Inderwick, Dr. Playfair, Mr. Luke Fildes, Mr. Forbes Robertson, and Mr. Oswald Crawfurd, to say nothing of whole rows of critics and other notabilities of the pen and pencil. Miss Marion Terry's gowns were beautiful beyond words; the ball-dress in the second act was rich white-and-gold brocade of Arabian Nights-like splendour, but very simply made, with a closely fitting, pointed golden girdle and a cloud of white ostrich and lilies-of-the-valley about the corsage. Her bouquet in this scene was of marvellous violet and white orchids. The graceful grey corduroy walking-gown which Miss Terry wore in the fourth act was not less becoming to her; like the first, it was of Princess build, but with elaborate garniture of fine steel, flowing in glittering rivulets from shoulder to waist, from waist to hem. The little grey and black bonnet to match is the most *espiègle* headgear imaginable. Miss Lily Hanbury wears a pale primrose tea-gown of lace and silk, with a Watteau pleat, in the first act; a light-blue satin ball-gown embroidered with gold and spangles in the second and third, and a delightful confection of chestnut-brown velvet and salmon-pink cashmere in the fourth.

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THE PLAYHOUSES.

BY CLEMENT SCOTT.

The curious attitude assumed by Mr. Oscar Wilde on the night of the production of his new play, 'Lady Windermere's Fan," tempts me to indulge in a few recollections. It is to me such an utter revelation to see the changed condition of things within the walls of a theatre between yesterday, when authors and managers alike were courteous, submissive, and deferential to "our kind friends in front," and to-day, when, undeterred by manager, unchecked by public voice, unreprimanded by men, and tacitly encouraged by women, an author lounges in front of the footlights without any becoming deference of attitude, takes no trouble to fling aside his half-smoked cigarette, and proceeds to compliment the audience on its good sense in liking what he himself has condescended to admire. Mr. William Archer told us the other day in his own half-humorous and half-cynical fashion that the names of Leicester Buckingham and of Frederic Guest Tomlins always grated on his sensitive ears. I don't see why it should be so, as neither the one nor the other is of very much account in the dramatic history of our times. They were both harmless and hard-working gentlemen. The one who makes poor Mr. Archer gnash his teeth was the son of a celebrated Radical politician, Silk Buckingham, and he divided his time between writing fiery leaders, scribbling dramatic and musical criticisms, and adapting French plays. He was not a giant even in his own days: he did not come up to the knees of George Henry Lewes, for whose criticisms I am surprised to find Mr. Archer has not much good to say. But Tomlins was a man of a sturdier and manlier type. He, too, was a violent politician, a political leader-writer, the clerk to an old City company, a learned Shakesperian scholar, and a dramatic critic. But to my tale. Years and years ago George Augustus Sala and Robert Brough wrote a most remarkable and brilliant poem, that professed to prophesy the ultimate fate of the leading literary men of their time. There was a remarkable prophecy anent old Tomlins. He was humorously depicted as reduced, in his old age, to selling "ginger pop" at the back of the pit of a London theatre, and slaying an offensive manager with one of his own stone bottles. The Tomlins stanza concluded somewhat in this fashion: "Him with a stout stone bottle slew! He hurled it from the pit!" By the most curious coincidence in the world, this prophecy was within an ace of becoming true, so far as the assault on the manager was concerned. I was present on the first night of Charles Reade's "Never Too Late to Mend" at the old Princess's, and the scene where the boy Josephs was lashed up to be flogged roused the whole house to indignation. Old Tomlins, feeling instinctively that the passion of the house was with him, sprang up in his stall and protested against the brutality and inartistic quality of the exhibition. An unseemly wrangle took place between the manager and the critic, but the public sympathised with Tomlins. I was present at the Adelphi on the first night of a play by Wilkie Collins, when Anson impetuously rushed to the front and lectured the audience for daring to dislike the work of so able an author and dramatist as Wilkie Collins. But Anson had reckoned without his host. They wanted to rend Anson and to scatter him about in little bits.

But supposing, after all, Mr. Oscar Wilde is a cynic of deeper significance than we take him to be. Supposing he intends to reform and revolutionise society at large by sublime self-sacrifice. There are two sides to every question, and Mr. Oscar Wilde's piety in social reform has not as yet been urged by anybody. His attitude has been so extraordinary

head in the presence of refined women, but I refuse to put down my cigarette. The working-man may put out his pipe when he spouts, but my cigarette is too 'precious' for destruction. I will show no humility, and I will stand unrebuked. I will take greater liberties with the public than any author who has ever preceded me in history. And I will retire scatheless. The society that allows boys to puff cigarette-smoke into the faces of ladies in the theatre-corridors will condone the originality of a smoking author on the stage." This may be the form of Mr. Oscar Wilde's curious cynicism. He may say, "I will test this question of manners and show that they are not nowadays recognised."

Having proved by a test so strong as this the indifference of society to what used to be called good manners and good breeding, Mr. Oscar Wilde may say, "I will show you also how unsentimental is the age in which we live. I cannot help it. I am not responsible for it, but there it is. I can only write for people as they are, not for people as they ought to be. I will prove to you by my play that the very instinct of maternity—that holiest and purest instinct with women—is deadened in the breasts of our English mothers. I will paint for you a young English mother who adores her husband, who has a firstborn child scarcely yet weaned from the breast, who has been brought up in a strictly decorous society, who has high views on religion and honour, and I will show how, without seeking reflection at her child's bedside, she will leave her husband, her home, her firstborn, her character, her reputation—and for what? For the arms of a man she does not profess to love. And for what reason? Because she has learned from the tittle-tattle of her friends that her husband has been false to her! This shall be accepted as the Gospel truth. I tell you that the mothers in society will not consider that I have outraged their sex or expressed anything but the truth. But this is not the only type of mother I will paint for you. You have seen how the good mother can desert her new-born infant without a pang. You shall see how the worldly mother shall, having recognised her lost child, part from her as she parts from the atelier of a Bond Street milliner. I will show you a mother who leaves her daughter for ever, unkissed, and goes downstairs to accept the hand of a roué admirer on her deserted daughter's doorstep. I tell you that society will not say one word except that it is all very amusing. Amusing they will consider it, but unnatural—never. It is society that is at fault, not I. I paint what I see; I am not a sentimentalist, but a cynic. The best test of the justice of my picture is found in the fact that society does not reprimand it." And then Mr. Oscar Wilde, pursuing this train of thought, may go on to say, "And I will prove to you also how inartistic are these people for whom I write. They have no nice sense of proportion. They don't understand balance of effect or light and shade. They are quick, and they will laugh at what is clever. They love 'smart people' and 'smart things.' They have canonised the word 'smart.' They don't care one brass farthing if the elderly man talks like the callow boy or the innocent girl like the blasée woman. They must all be up to date and smart. 'To be intelligible is to be found out.' I have never since I left Oxford and won the Newdigate with my poem on 'Ravenna' been wholly intelligible. And I have never been found out." Thus might argue Mr. Oscar Wilde in his own defence. Meanwhile, society at large will rush to see his play.

lady declare that what the age suffers from is want of principle and want of profile. Many of Mr. Wilde's jokes are mere flippant perversions of known phrases, as "What is the use of the lower classes unless they set us a good example?" or "Divorces are made in heaven." One is inclined on hearing these things to say with Touchstone, "I'll *joke* you so eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping-hours excepted." Take a few proverbs, transpose them ever so slightly, throw in a dash of cynicism, and if possible a flavour of alliteration, and the thing is done. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" may thus become "A virtuous woman is a curse to her household." Your public will roar with laughter, and you will be accepted as a wit. Here is, as Sir Walter says, "the trick." Severely as H. J. Byron was condemned for the jokes and verbal quibbles he dragged by head and shoulders into his plays, these were the height of wit compared to the mixture of paradox and persiflage now given. To say that a crew of bibulous mariners in frequent conflict with the law were known as the leaky boats, because they had to be so frequently bailed out, is more brilliant than to say that truth is never pure and never simple. Yet frivolous, saucy, and impertinent as Mr. Wilde's dialogue is, and uncharacteristic also, since every personage in the drama says the same things, it is, in a way, diverting. The audience laughs consumedly, and the critic, even should he chafe, which is surely superfluous, laughs also in spite of himself. There is, moreover, a grave serenity of acquiescence in the most monstrous propositions that is actually and highly humorous. In the opening scene Algernon Moncrieffe, the occupant of fashionable chambers in Piccadilly, says to his servant, "Lane, I dined here yesterday, Mr. Worthing and Mr. —— (the other name doesn't matter), and we drank, I find, eight bottles of champagne." "Eight bottles and a pint, sir." "How comes it, Lane, that the servants drink more in bachelors' chambers than in private houses?" "I think, sir, because the wines are better. You *do* get some very poor wine in private houses nowadays." This, or something like it, is said with a seriousness and aplomb that are genuinely diverting. A man, in fact, does not hit public taste unless he has capacity or gift of some kind. It is easy to find fault with Mr. Wilde's latest piece. It is, indeed, difficult to do anything else. A tendency to resentment at the low estimate put on the judgment of those for whom the writer caters is conceivable. It is, however, easier, and perhaps more advantageous, to laugh. Few opportunities are afforded the actors, but of these the most is made. Mr. Alexander's acting in farce has a sort of air of pensive protest which is effective. Misses Rose Leclercq, Irene Vanbrugh, and Millard, Messrs. Nutcombe Gould and Kinsey Peile were seen to advantage.

"LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN."

THE same words may be said of "Lady Windermere's Fan." It can scarcely be regarded as a serious contribution to the drama. It gained a kind of notoriety from the conduct of the author; it deserved its measure of success from the excellence of much of the acting. Miss Marion Terry never played so well as she played as Mrs. Erlynne. Mr. Alexander chose a small part, and made it, as far as acting could, a work of art. Mr. Ben Webster, whose success in "The Plowdens" I have already saluted, made his first marked success as Cecil Grahame. It was not the smartness of the cynicism which he had to utter which made the part a success, but a vitality, a sense of characterisation, a genuine creative power in Mr. Webster's performance which at once marked for him a signal advance in his art. It would really seem as if Mr. Webster were one of the coming men; he is certainly one of the very first, if not the first, in his own immediate rank of young players. So the piece has rendered, as it were unawares, a service to that dramatic interpretation of which its author has said so many absurd things.

MR. OSCAR WILDE is inclined to be peevish with his critics. Yet his critics were very patient with him. He wrote what he called a play, and he peppered it with not unamiable paradox, and diverted a considerable number of persons. But it takes more than this to convert an adventurous Bœotian into the ideal blend of, let us say, Goethe, Shakspeare, and Baffo, which appears to be Mr. Wilde's own image of himself. Mr. Wilde has in his time aroused the gaiety of English-speaking countries. It delights him—as the performance delights the spectators—to masque as an Athenian. But he is no Athenian. George Meredith brands one of his creations as "An Epicurean whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his Garden." The Athenians would not have been tolerant of this sham Athenian. Mr. Wilde seems most to resemble the man in Charles de Bernard's ablest novel, who always had Art upon his lips because he had so little in his soul. Mr. Wilde has called his play a work of art. That of course it is not, could not be. Mr. Wilde is many things needless to enumerate, but he is not an artist. His utterances upon art must be regarded with a delicate disdain.

JUSTIN HUNTLY McCARTHY.

THE MORNING POST,

AN ADVENTUROUS AUTHOR.

BY ANDREW LANG.

No publisher ever posed to me as a moral mentor. None ever offered to collaborate with me, as Blackwood did with Sir Walter Scott, whose reply is unpublishable in this modest column. None ever wanted to swear eternal friendship with me at first sight, though, to be sure, a publisher (not British) did lately invite me to write a book on the Life and Adventures of Mr. Oscar Wilde. Had the publisher

THE ILLUSTRATED SPORTING AND DRAMATIC NEWS.

MAY 6, 1893.

MR. OSCAR WILDE is said to have been discovered not long since, pencil in hand, pondering thoughtfully over a type-written copy of his play, *A Woman of No Importance.* A friend came upon him and inquired the nature of the task with which he was occupied. "I am seeing whether it is possible to alter or omit anything in this play—and yet," he reflectively added, "who am I that I should venture to tamper with a work of such genius!" That, of course, was a very nice point. Some one whom Mr. Wilde did not know claimed acquaintance with him the other day, and, perceiving that he was not recognised, feebly remarked, "You don't reco[illegible] your name, perfectly—but I cannot recall your face," was the reply; and that, too, wants thinking about.

In last Tuesday's agony column of the *Times* there appeared the advertisement of a clergyman who was anxious to obtain a pulpit for Whit-Sunday, when he wished to deliver a sermon on *Hypatia*. It was kindly meant, of course, and shows the useful influences of the Church and State Guild; but the clerical puff of the late Haymarket play came nearly a month too late. If, however, the reverend gentleman [illegible] pulpit in which to discourse of *A Woman of no Importance*, he might do a very useful little bit of *réclame*.

expect from you. It has been resolved to limit the individual subscription to ten guineas." Ten guineas! Our first thought was to send ten shillings—a sum which far exceeds the love which we bore the reverend doctor. Then, after more mature reflection, our resolution fails us; we dare not have the courage of our opinions, and we are by no means cheerful givers of the cheque which finally swells the list of the doctor's admirers. Why should we have given anything at all? Why should we weakly accede to the request of a friend who solicits aid on behalf of an institution for decayed Punch-and-Judy men? We may have no interest in these unfortunate gentlemen; we may even regard their exhibition as an extremely immoral one; and yet we give, simply because that friend who importunes us on their behalf is one who will not be denied. Nobody but a very rich man likes to be considered illiberal, and it is a cowardly disinclination to incur that charge which prompts our generosity in most of these instances. Certainly it would be a great comfort on these occasions to be able to refer the applicants to a "Social Demands Insurance Company," and to inform them that all our charity is done through its agency,—for there would be no need to give them any further information as to whether our yearly subscription to the said institution was fifty pounds or fifty shillings. Unfortunately, the facetious suggestion of the writer in the *Times* is not capable of realisation; though we admit with sorrow that it is just as likely to be realised as a change in our way of thought. Society will still go on levying blackmail, and we shall still continue to pay it meekly, however much we may grumble at the infliction.

OSCAR WILDE'S COMEDY.

WE shall not be suspected of any great sympathy with the methods and the feats of Mr. Oscar Wilde. In this journal we have always disclaimed respect for the forms of charlatanism in which it has pleased him to indulge, and which he would, we suspect, be about the first himself to admit. But a charlatan may be a man of conspicuous ability; and on the withdrawal from the stage for the present of his first-acted comedy, after a career of great success, it is but appropriate in us as it is fair to him to signalise the addition to our acted plays of a comedy of society-manners pure and simple which may fairly claim its place among the recognised names in that almost extinct class of drama. We have, indeed, too much amongst us of Ibsen and his parallels not to note it with satisfaction. We can ourselves find nothing in *A Doll's House* beyond a fairly interesting domestic drama, with a story and characters which are nothing if not old, a kind of Martin Chuzzlewit married to Dora Copperfield, and a type of such very old-fashioned heredity as belongs to a gentleman who has the gout because his father drank; and we are grateful to Mr. Wilde for a straightforward comedy which professes no purpose but comedy's best and truest,—to entertain. A reproduction of contemporary "polite conversation" after the manner which we noticed long since in reviewing a republication of Swift, and which Sheridan idealised in the *School for Scandal*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, as a specimen of true comedy, is a head and shoulders above any of its contemporaries for some years syne. It has nothing in common with farcical comedy, with didactic comedy, or the "literary" comedy of which we have heard so much of late from disappointed authors, whose principal claim to literature appears to consist in being undramatic. It is a distinguishing note of Mr. Wilde that he has condescended to leave his business, and has written a workmanlike play as well as a good comedy. Without that it would be worthless, and how much he may owe to his manager's skill and help, according to another endless controversy, lies between those two, and concerns us not. If Mr. Alexander is as helpful as he is modest, it may be much. For the character of Lord Windermere affords him little opportunity of personal distinction. Indeed, the peculiarity as well as the weakness of the play consists in the fact that the interest lies entirely with two women,—as well acted as they well could be.

The story, for those who have not seen it, lies in a nutshell. We regret the disappearance of the old method of publication, for *Lady Windermere* would be worth reading. Lord Windermere has married for love a young lady whose mother they suppose dead, but she turns up in the guise of a *divorcée* of some notoriety in society, and Lord Windermere submits to be blackmailed in order to conceal the fact from his wife, and pays her many sums of money. The object of this Mrs. Erlynne, as she calls herself, is, like the heroine of *Forget-me-not*, to regain a place in society, and she gets an invitation to a ball given by Lady Windermere, who, meanwhile, has been informed by some good-natured friends of the gossip of society about her husband and Mrs. Erlynne, whose appearance at the ball causes a sensation. Outraged in her feelings, Lady Windermere leaves a note to wish her lord good-bye, and flies to the rooms of an admirer, a certain Lord Darlington. Thither Mrs. Erlynne, who intercepts the letter, follows to save her daughter, for whom her heart and better feelings are thus suddenly aroused. Determined to save her at any cost, she takes upon herself the ownership of an accusing fan, her husband's gift, which, on the rooms being invaded by a circle of men, he being one of them, she mislays in a room she hides in. In again losing herself, Mrs. Erlynne thus saves her daughter, who at the end is thoroughly reconciled with the husband who really loves her; while Mrs. Erlynne finds a husband in an adoring lordling, and leaves England, where she never knows "whether the fogs cause the depressed people, or the depressed people cause the fogs," the secret of her relationship to the heroine remaining a secret still.

It will be seen that there is nothing new in the old story which has more or less framed half the comedies of intrigue which fine-folk comedy has so freely inspired. But the novelty of drama lies in treatment; and while there is no suggestion of coarseness in Mr. Wilde's play, there is plenty both of good feeling and of complex character, while there is opportunity for good acting, which is plentifully used. Miss Winifred Emery plays Lady Windermere with a charm and skill which has placed her quite in the front rank amongst our emotional actresses, the more remarkable because she was not the first representative of the part. Her acting suggests both heart and brains, and most effective is the contrast which she supplies with Miss Marian Terry, who, if not a little overshadowed by the fame of her elder sister, would bear even a better stage-name than she does. To those who remember the eldest and earliest Kate, she brings many curious shades of association. These old stage-families, to which both the Terrys and the Emerys belong, have singular aristocracies of their own, which, with a Gray or Webster at their side, it is curious to contrast with the Vane Tempests and Nutcombe Goulds, who bring new blood of another kind into the theatrical ranks. Mr. Gould is a quite remarkable figure in the comedy for bearing and breeding, combined with quiet force and skill. Indeed, the whole cast is in its manner as noteworthy as the play. Mr. Wilde's dialogue, which is the chief feature of the comedy—as, given the essentials, of course it should be—is throughout conveyed with point and appreciation. The genial and *blasé* tone which modern society of the special class affects is as admirably caught and sustained as were the would-be smartnesses of Miss Neveroul and her friends in Swift's *Polite Conversation*. All the close observation and thought which the comedy-writer requires Mr. Wilde has brought to bear upon the "puppets" with whom, in his capacity of advertising author, he has waged newspaper-war, and his puppets have repaid him in kind. If his Duchess is rather trying, it is more because she indulges in certain odd circular sweeps with her arm which nobody could possibly perform in a drawing-room, than because duchesses are supposed to be unlike other people. In conversational respects, they are perhaps as "much of a muchness" as Mr. Wilde makes them. The way in which she secures a fresh young Australian for her meek daughter, who is sent out of the way to inspect photographs, or to look at the moon, whenever her mother proposes to talk scandal, and her delightful summaries of the male sex, who "grow old, but never grow good," and are brutes who only want to be cooked for, are very amusing stage-talk to listen to. Another refreshing element in the play is the entire absence of the stage-servant, who seems so terrible a necessity in comedy. We all know what use even Sheridan made of them, amusing as that was. And to find nothing but a man-servant and maid-servant, who do just what they are engaged for, their business and no more, is a piece of "realism" in the right direction. Indeed, the whole comedy, its plan and its writing, its people and its dresses, its colouring and its tone, deserve, as we think, these lines of record from us on its withdrawal from the boards, as an unique specimen in our day—as far as we know, absolutely

unique—apart from all questions of its merits and demerits, of the comedy of fine-life manners. Since the club scene in *Money*, there has been no simply "man's scene" so clearly marked as that in Lord Darlington's chambers. Otherwise, Lord Lytton's favourite sentimentalities in *Money* interfere with it woefully as a comedy-picture. Not the least pleasant reminiscence to playgoers, in connection with *Lady Windermere's Fan*, will be the very amusing skit which it evoked at another comedy theatre, under the title of *The Poet and the Puppets*. As a thoroughly good-humoured piece of burlesque, not so much on the play as on the eccentricities and methods of the well-known author, it has not often been beaten. Not the least amusing reminiscence, on the other hand, will be the ferocious wrath which, on its first appearance, the play provoked among the regular stage-critics, almost to a man. Except that Mr. Wilde smoked a cigarette when called on, it is difficult to see why,—unless it was because the comedy ran off the beaten track, which is just what they are always deprecating.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—The most significant item of the American elections of November 8th, so far as enduring political lessons, and not mere temporary interests, are concerned, is the terrific effect of the secret ballot, under which three-fourths of the States voted, most of them for the first time. It instantly reduces the controlling party of the United States—with nearly half the voters, more than half the States, three-fourths of the wealth, and probably as large a part of the ability—to a mere New England faction, plus a scattered State here and there over the country, without a future, and without any distinctive bases for a future except those the country has twice beaten into ruin.

This could not happen, and did not happen, to a party all of whose members supported it voluntarily. It seems certain that at least a hundred thousand men—eliminating recent acts and local issues—have for years wished to desert the party, but were held to it by the tremendous weapon of social opprobrium, added to actual intimidation and the fear of ruinous disfavour in business. No one who has not lived there can appreciate the moral courage it takes to turn open Democrat in a tribe-bound Republican community; to turn Catholic in a Protestant one is really a light thing in comparison. The party has, in fact, for years been like a corpse in a mound, retaining the form of man only by excluding the outer air.

But the conclusion I wish to enforce is that, for good or evil, the secret ballot emancipates the masses wholly from the power of the upper few; either the power to plunder, or the power to coerce into accepting political guidance. In this case, it enables them to escape from keeping a party dominated by great manufacturing interests to rob them shamelessly under pretext of giving them back more in wages and social comfort; in another aspect, it certainly takes the controlling power from the ablest, most courageous, and most independent class, and gives it to the more timid and inefficient. Yet, again, no community is made up of moral heroes, and the change makes the majority their own real masters. The *Spectator* thinks it "monstrous" that a man should have power he is too cowardly to exercise in public. May I say, on the other side, I think it monstrous that the chance of heredity should enable a master who is ten times a coward to do as he will without risking a meal, while his underling risks beggary for his family if he refuses to be a political serf? The upper classes are largely open, not because they have more courage than the lower, but because they can afford to be, and because they were born to a place in which they could afford to be. I deny that I (for example) am more a coward than my neighbour because he has £10,000 a year in stocks, and I have only my salary; and I think it unfair that I should be called a coward for not liking to be a martyr, while he is lauded as a hero for doing as he pleases when he has nothing to fear. At all events, this election shows that no privileged class can be built up by indirection under a secret ballot, and that it can be under either an open ballot or a *viva voce* system. This, independently of the question whether such a class is a good thing to have.—I am, Sir, &c.,

Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A. Forrest Morgan.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRIVACY.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—While acknowledging the general truth of the remarks in "The Privilege of Privacy," in the *Spectator* of the 19th inst., I feel bound, in the interest of others, to take exception to the particular instance upon which the article is founded. In common with many others in this parish, I feel that a grave injustice has been done in the publication of a letter written by an insane girl, in which the reputation of several persons is seriously attacked. There is absolutely no evidence to show that she had been exposed to any annoyance in the neighbourhood in which she resided, except such as arose occasionally from the rudeness of a few rough boys who play in the street, certainly without any idea of persecution. The clergyman who said at the inquest that the girl's mind had only too probably become unhinged by such trouble, is a Baptist minister. The clergy of the parish would never have ventured on such a statement, which they believe cannot be substantiated; and they feel that a great injustice has been done both to the neighbourhood in which the girl lived, and to those whose names have been so unadvisedly published in the letter of one who was clearly insane, and therefore not responsible for the damage she might do to the reputation of innocent persons.—I am, Sir, &c., George Dunlop, Vicar of Knowle.

REITERATION IN PREACHING.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—A confirmation by an "Evangelist" from practical experience of your view in the *Spectator* of November 19th, may be of interest. The writer has been in intimate contact with many or most of the successful Evangelists in England, within and without the Established Church, as also with those in America and on the Continent; and, so far as he is aware, they all repeat the same addresses from year to year, some of them through the whole course of their ministry. I remember the remark being made: "Mr. Moody still preaches the 'Daniel sermon' that he has preached for twenty-five years."

Out of a number of addresses, a speaker finds a proportion which produce certain results; and if he is wise, he will drop the less effective ones, and repeat certainly those more effective. Each repetition makes them more clear and pointed, both in expression and illustration. The familiarity with them leaves him at more mental liberty to concentrate his attention on his hearers, and to use those oratorical adjuncts which increase the effectiveness of speaking. More earnestness and emphasis can be thrown into an address which, from its familiarity to the speaker, requires less mental effort in the arrangement of thought.

What success the writer has had with multitudes in every country, from Oregon to Berlin, he attributes largely to having laid aside the personal gratification of variety of composition, and to having confined himself to the repetition to fresh audiences of those addresses which he has found most effective in definite results. It is the general experience of the Evangelist that his own subjective experience, at the time of delivery, is no measure of the effect produced. The times when he most deeply feels a sense of mechanical repetition and failure and humiliation, are often those of most manifest success, judged by the results; while elation and joy in giving his message are often accompanied by the smallest impression on his audience.—I am, Sir, &c.,

London, November 19th. Evangelist.

THE EXTENT OF OUR RIGHTS OVER ANIMALS.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—It is much to be regretted that men cannot discuss a difficult question without abuse and ridicule. What is demanded of us is,—have we a right to inflict excruciating tortures upon unoffending animals in order to relieve human diseases, which have their seat in the brain, as the result, in nine cases out of ten, of neglect or violation of natural laws? Animals have their rights as well as men. We all agree that we have dominion over them, so far as to use them for food, for clothing, and for help in our labour. But does the claim extend to experiments of the most cruel kind which professedly lead to results that would be better reached by slower and more trustworthy observation of the human patient?

These tortures, inflicted upon our companions and fellow-heirs of earth, have been justified by the dictum that "the law of sacrifice is the law of life;" but surely the value of all

that I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. possible that he may have said himself, "I will show and prove to you [illegible] are not only recognised but endorsed in this wholly free and unrestrained age. I will do on the stage of a public theatre what I should not dare do at a mass meeting in the Park. I will uncover my

OUR PORTRAITS.

We are indebted to Messrs. Fradelle and Young, 246, Regent Street, for our portrait of the late Sir George Campbell; to Messrs. Maull and Fox, 187A, Piccadilly, for that of the late Mr. H. W. Bates; to Messrs. Elliott and Fry, 55, Baker Street, for that of the late Lord Justice Cotton; and to Messrs. Downey, of Ebury Street, for that of Mr. Oscar Wilde.

that I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. possible that he may have said to himself, "I will show and prove to you to what an extent bad manners are not only recognised but endorsed in this wholly free and unrestrained age. I will do on the stage of a public theatre what I should not dare do at a mass meeting in the Park. I will uncover my

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The latest addition to the noble company of playwrights is Mr. Oscar Wilde, whose very successful début in his new rôle was awaited by many with as much curiosity as interest. Just now, too, all Paris is on the *qui vive* for his play of "Salomè," founded on sacred history, and written solely and originally in French by this most versatile of geniuses, though whether or no he is to reap fresh laurels thereby remains to be seen. Mr. Oscar Wilde is, as everyone knows, the younger son of Sir William Wilde, the celebrated Irish oculist; and of his clever wife, whose *nom de guerre* of "Speranza" will be well remembered by all who have any cognisance or recollection of the Young Ireland movement, but who of late years has turned her attention more to folk-lore than to politics. Mr. Wilde's career has been a varied and a brilliant succession of *tableaux vivants*, so to speak, from the commencement, as winner of the Newdigate at Oxford and leader of the then infantile æsthetic craze, to his present semi-public position as lecturer, man of fashion, wit, poet, novelist, essayist, and dramatist all in one. His lecturing tour in America was literally a species of royal progress, even "God Save the Queen" being played to mark his entry into a ball-room. Perhaps his most remarkable attribute, after his mastery of paradox and skill in epigram, is the imperturbable and courtly serenity which characterises his every speech and action. Mr. Wilde was married, some eight years ago, to Miss Constance Lloyd, daughter of Mr. Horace Lloyd, and is the father of two very beautiful boys. His house in Tite Street, Chelsea, was decorated by the late Mr. Godwin, and is, with its subtle harmonies of green and blue, its peacock-like charm of colouring, and quaint, old-world furniture, strangely in consonance with the spirit of modern art and its somewhat *fin-de-siècle* occupier.

MR. OSCAR WILDE.

THE PLAYHOUSES.

BY CLEMENT SCOTT.

The curious attitude assumed by Mr. Oscar Wilde on the night of the production of his new play, 'Lady Windermere's Fan," tempts me to indulge in a few recollections. It is to me such

A very full and, on the whole, admiring house greeted the production of Mr. Oscar Wilde's play ("Lady Windermere's Fan") at the St. James's Theatre the other evening, and never did audience at a *première* appear less brilliantly attired. It may be that the stage dresses, which certainly were miracles of fine colour and distinction, threw everything else a little into the shade; it may be that the recent sad necessity for mourning garments has pushed aside the instinct for pretty gowns. Certainly, with few exceptions the feminine portion of the assemblage was gowned wisely, maybe, but decidedly not too well. However, there were bright spots here and there. Mrs. Bram Stoker wore a wonderful evening wrap of striped brocade with "thousand rare encolourings." Mrs. Oscar Wilde looked charming in her pale-blue brocaded gown, made after the fashion of Charles the First's time, with its long tabbed bodice, slashed sleeves, and garniture of old lace and pearls. Mrs. Jopling-Rowe was becomingly arrayed in shrimp-pink, lightly accented with black. Some of the other wearers of pleasing toilettes were Mrs. Pinero, Miss Julia Neilson, and Miss Florence Terry. Among those present were Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Campbell-Praed, Mr. Bancroft, Mrs. Hare, Mr. Charles Matthews, Mr. Inderwick, Dr. Playfair, Mr. Luke Fildes, Mr. Forbes Robertson, and Mr. Oswald Crawfurd, to say nothing of whole rows of critics and other notabilities of the pen and pencil. Miss Marion Terry's gowns were beautiful beyond words: the ball-dress in the second act was rich white-and-gold brocade of Arabian Nights-like splendour, but very simply made, with a closely fitting, pointed golden girdle and a cloud of white ostrich and lilies-of-the-valley about the corsage. Her bouquet in this scene was of marvellous violet and white orchids. The graceful grey corduroy walking-gown which Miss Terry wore in the fourth act was not less becoming to her; like the first, it was of Princess build, but with elaborate garniture of fine steel, flowing in glittering rivulets from shoulder to waist, from waist to hem. The little grey and black bonnet to match is the most *espiègle* headgear imaginable. Miss Lily Hanbury wears a pale primrose tea-gown of lace and silk, with a Watteau pleat, in the first act; a light-blue satin ball-gown embroidered with gold and [illegible] the second and third, and a delightful confection of chestnut-brown velvet and salmon-pink cashmere in the fourth.

THE PLAYHOUSES.

BY CLEMENT SCOTT.

The curious attitude assumed by Mr. Oscar Wilde on the night of the production of his new play, 'Lady Windermere's Fan," tempts me to indulge in a few recollections. It is to me such an utter revelation to see the changed condition of things within the walls of a theatre between yesterday, when authors and managers alike were courteous, submissive, and deferential to "our kind friends in front," and to-day, when, undeterred by manager, unchecked by public voice, unreprimanded by men, and tacitly encouraged by women, an author lounges in front of the footlights without any becoming deference of attitude, takes no trouble to fling aside his half-smoked cigarette, and proceeds to compliment the audience on its good sense in liking what he himself has condescended to admire! Mr. William Archer told us the other day in his own half-humorous and half-cynical fashion that the names of Leicester Buckingham and of Frederic Guest Tomlins always grated on his sensitive ears. I don't see why it should be so, as neither the one nor the other is of very much account in the dramatic history of our times. They were both harmless and hard-working gentlemen. The one who makes poor Mr. Archer gnash his teeth was the son of a celebrated Radical politician, Silk Buckingham, and he divided his time between writing fiery leaders, scribbling dramatic and musical criticisms, and adapting French plays. He was not a giant even in his own days: he did not come up to the knees of George Henry Lewes, for whose criticisms I am surprised to find Mr. Archer has not much good to say. But Tomlins was a man of a sturdier and manlier type. He, too, was a violent politician, a political leader-writer, the clerk to an old City company, a learned Shaksperian scholar, and a dramatic critic. But to my tale. Years and years ago George Augustus Sala and Robert Brough wrote a most remarkable and brilliant poem, that professed to prophesy the ultimate fate of the leading literary men of their time. There was a remarkable prophecy anent old Tomlins. He was humorously depicted as reduced, in his old age, to selling "ginger pop" at the back of the pit of a London theatre, and slaying an offensive manager with one of his own stone bottles. The Tomlins stanza concluded somewhat in this fashion: "Him with a stout stone bottle slew! He hurled it from the pit!" By the most curious coincidence in the world, this prophecy was within an ace of becoming true, so far as the assault on the manager was concerned. I was present on the first night of Charles Reade's "Never Too Late to Mend" at the old Princess's, and the scene where the boy Josephs was lashed up to be flogged roused the whole house to indignation. Old Tomlins, feeling instinctively that the passion of the house was with him, sprang up in his stall and protested against the brutality and inartistic quality of the exhibition. An unseemly wrangle took place between the manager and the critic, but the public sympathised with Tomlins. I was present at the Adelphi on the first night of a play by Wilkie Collins, when Anson impetuously rushed to the front and lectured the audience for daring to dislike the work of so able an author and dramatist as Wilkie Collins. But Anson had reckoned without his host. They wanted to rend Anson and to scatter him about in little bits.

But supposing, after all, Mr. Oscar Wilde is a cynic of deeper significance than we take him to be. Supposing he intends to reform and regenerate society at large by a life of self-sacrifice. There are two sides to every question, and Mr. Oscar Wilde's piety in social reform has not as yet been urged by anybody. His attitude has been so extraordinary

gown of lace and silk, with a Watteau pleat, in the first act; a light-blue satin ball-gown embroidered with gold and spangles in the second and third, and a delightful confection of chestnut-brown velvet and salmon-pink cashmere in the fourth.

head in the presence of refined women, but I refuse to put down my cigarette. The working-man may put out his pipe when he spouts, but my cigarette is too 'precious' for destruction. I will show no humility, and I will stand unrebuked. I will take greater liberties with the public than any author who has ever preceded me in history. And I will retire scatheless. The society that allows boys to puff cigarette-smoke into the faces of ladies in the theatre-corridors will condone the originality of a smoking author on the stage." This may be the form of Mr. Oscar Wilde's curious cynicism. He may say, "I will test this question of manners and show that they are not nowadays recognised."

Having proved by a test so strong as this the indifference of society to what used to be called good manners and good breeding, Mr. Oscar Wilde may say, "I will show you also how unsentimental is the age in which we live. I cannot help it. I am not responsible for it, but there it is. I can only write for people as they are, not for people as they ought to be. I will prove to you by my play that the very instinct of maternity—that holiest and purest instinct with women—is deadened in the breasts of our English mothers. I will paint for you a young English mother who adores her husband, who has a firstborn child scarcely yet weaned from the breast, who has been brought up in a strictly decorous society, who has high views on religion and honour, and I will show how, without seeking reflection at her child's bedside, she will leave her husband, her home, her firstborn, her character, her reputation—and for what? For the arms of a man shedoes not profess to love. And for what reason? Because she has learned from the tittle-tattle of her friends that her husband has been false to her! This shall be accepted as the Gospel truth. I tell you that the mothers in society will not consider that I have outraged their sex or expressed anything but the truth. But this is not the only type of mother I will paint for you. You have seen how the good mother can desert her new-born infant without a pang. You shall see how the worldly mother shall, having recognised her lost child, part from her as she parts from the atelier of a Bond Street milliner. I will show you a mother who leaves her daughter for ever, unkissed, and goes downstairs to accept the hand of a roué admirer on her deserted daughter's doorstep. I tell you that society will not say one word except that it is all very amusing. Amusing they will consider it, but unnatural—never. It is society that is at fault, not I. I paint what I see; I am not a sentimentalist, but a cynic. The best test of the justice of my picture is found in the fact that society does not reprimand it." And then Mr. Oscar Wilde, pursuing this train of thought, may go on to say, "And I will prove to you also how inartistic are these people for whom I write. They have no nice sense of proportion. They don't understand balance of effect or light and shade. They are quick, and they will laugh at what is clever. They love 'smart people' and 'smart things.' They have canonised the word 'smart.' They don't care one brass farthing if the elderly man talks like the callow boy or the innocent girl like the blasée woman. They must all be up to date and smart. 'To be intelligible is to be found out.' I have never since I [illegible] and won the Newdigate with my poem on Ravenna been wholly intelligible. And I have never been found out." Thus might argue Mr. Oscar Wilde in his own defence. Meanwhile, society at large will rush to see his play.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, April 29, 1893.

THE LADIES' COLUMN.

BY MRS. FENWICK-MILLER.

There are two theatres—the Haymarket and the Lyceum—at which, on "first nights," there is always to be found a distinguished and interesting audience. Mrs. Oscar Wilde had the stage box of the Haymarket, on April 19, with Mr. Arthur Balfour, M.P., and Mr. Burne-Jones. Lord Wolverton, Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, and Sir E. Clarke, Q.C., occupied other boxes. Lady Randolph Churchill, who is coming to the front again as well as her husband, sat near Lady Granby in the stalls; Lady Randolph wore in her hair an aigrette set so near the front as to produce a very uncommon effect. Many heads were bound with fillets, and the low dressing of the hair to the back of the head was very general. As usual, it was impossible to overlook the people who were dressed in black and in scarlet, the two most effective colours for theatre wear. Mrs. Arthur Lewis (Miss Kate Terry) mingled black and gold in her costume, and Mrs. Herbert Schmalz wore black, with the relief of a large cluster of primroses.

However, the stage dresses outdo the smartest of the audience's attire. It is unusual to see Mrs. Bernard Beere all in black, as she is throughout, but it is picturesquely made, and draped with white plain muslin in a unique way. Miss Neilson's dresses are the smartest, perhaps, but Mrs. Tree's the prettiest. Miss Neilson wears first a gown of stiff grey moiré antique, made with huge sleeves to the elbow and deep lace frills to the edges of the sleeves and as a berthe. Her next dress is of white silk covered with net, embroidered with gold spangles all over, so that she glitters as she stands like a waterfall in the sunshine. The sleeves of this are of white silk muslin, arranged in three full puffs to the elbow, and then edged with a deep frill of spangled net so wide as to fall far below the arm when raised. Her last gown is the most fashionable in outline; it is eight or ten yards round apparently. It is of a pink spotted silk, thin and yet firm, quite an old-fashioned material, and is arranged in a very wide bell skirt trimmed round with three rows of silk ruche at the foot, and a similar number above the knee, while the bodice is indescribably elaborate. Mrs. Tree, who has a part that fits her to as much perfection as the gowns in which she dresses it, wears first a pretty soft silk, having a cream ground brocaded with dear little festoons of pink roses. There are puffed sleeve-tops of the silk, while the yoke and cuffs are veiled in cream lace. With this goes a broad-brimmed white hat, with black velvet and feathers for trimming. Her best dress is the next, a thoroughly "Empire" evening one, made of pale-pink silk marked out into a dice pattern by lines of a paler pink. The very high waist is outlined with a silver cord, and above that comes a flat berthe of silk muslin, topped by revers covering the tops of the sleeves, which are silk muslin. A trail of roses foots the narrow train, which falls from between the shoulders.

"A Woman of No Importance"

BY W. MOY THOMAS

To say that the most stirring situation in Mr. Oscar Wilde's new play at the Haymarket is one of the most familiar commonplaces of the French stage, is only to say that the author of *A Woman of No Importance* adheres to the opinion that he is understood to entertain on the subject of dramatic invention. "Let me see," said a spectator in the stalls to his neighbour, on the first night, "in what French melodrama is it that we have a mother who stays the uplifted arm of her illegitimate son by exclaiming—'Hold, Henri, he is your father'?" The answer was, "Ask, rather, in what French melodrama is it not?" The sarcasm, however, would be lost on Mr. Wilde, who, so far from fearing the charge of poverty of invention, will go out of his way to show his contempt for ingenuity of design by dipping for his materials in the very oldest "bag of tricks" of the hack playwright. As the great cook is not he who can delight with choice viands, but rather the genius of the kitchen who knows how to make a ragout of shoe-leather which shall be appetising and nutritious, it may be allowed that there is some truth in Mr. Wilde's alleged theories. It is certain that many a play has afforded pleasure in spite of an intrigue that is destitute of novelty or even of plausibility. Clever characterisation, brilliant dialogue, shrewd satire, human relations that throw a sudden light on the problems of life and the philosophy of society, may, it is clear, go very far to console us for a threadbare theme. The story of "lovely woman" who "stoops to folly" was certainly not told to the world for the first time when the two grey volumes of Goldsmith's immortal prose idyll first issued from Mr. Newberry's shop. It was assuredly not unfamiliar to the audiences who more than a hundred years later have wept tears both of pity and delight over the performance of Miss Ellen Terry in Mr. Wills's beautiful play. So Mr. Wilde's triangular scene of the furious son, Gerald Arbuthnot, in the person of Mr. F. Terry, about to slay the profligate Lord Illingworth for an insult offered to the pretty American girl, Hester Worsley, and the terrified mother who involuntarily betrays the secret of her life in her anxiety to arrest her son's avenging hand, together with much else in his play that seems wilfully conventional and insincere, might be accepted in the presence of qualities which demand powers of a higher kind than mere Scribean ingenuity of intrigue. But, unfortunately, Mr. Wilde has done little more than suggest a noble theme and garnish it with cynical epigrams which, regarded as mere exercises of wit and sprightly fancy, are not always—I may even say, not often—worthy of praise.

So far as there is a serious purpose in Mr. Wilde's play, it appears to be that of rebuking the rich and idle class of society for its love of pleasure, its cynicism, its mean profligacy, its contempt of principle, its hatred of enthusiasm, its profound disbelief in the existence of anything better than itself. The protagonist of this Schopenhauerian world is Lord Illingworth, the middle-aged *roué* who speaks of the girl whom he has cheated and betrayed some twenty years earlier as "a woman of no importance"; the chorus is the New England maiden, played by Miss Neilson, with her Puritanical ideas of honesty and honour, which she takes frequent opportunity of communicating to her aristocratic hostess and friends, even venturing on one occasion upon a vehement tirade in which she contrasts American virtue with English vice in a way that must have put a rather severe strain upon the obligations of hospitality. But the working out of the story brings with it few of the moral lessons which lurk in most presentments of human life wherein the conflict of passions and of interests is followed to its natural issues. In the end, the machinery of the dramatist seems to have been set in motion merely in order to provide Mrs. Arbuthnot with the triumph of rejecting Lord Illingworth's tardy offer of "reparation," together with the vulgar gratification of smacking his face for being insolent, and of dismissing him with the retort that *he* is a "person of no importance." There are, undoubtedly, some truthful touches in the relations of mother and son. Among these is the deep emotion of the mother, finely portrayed by Mrs. Bernard Beere, when, having related her own story under the cover of another name, her son interpolates the remark that the lady who fled from her home with the wicked nobleman "could not have been a nice girl"; but the play seems to miss the moral that this incident conveys. The plain truth is that there are women whose good instincts are sufficient to protect them even against the arts of a Lord Illingworth, and that it is rather these than the Mrs. Arbuthnots who are entitled to wear snow-white fichus and assume an abiding air of purity and saintly resignation. It has been said that Mr. Wilde's personages all speak in the same style and manner, and are mere puppets uttering the author's cynical aphorisms, but the charge is not quite true. The hostess of Hunstanton, for example, played by Miss Rose Leclercq with all that actress's sweet stateliness, has a worldly-minded vein which differs considerably from the amusingly apathetic wrong-headedness of Lady Caroline Pontefract, cleverly played by Miss Le Thiere. Mrs. Allonby, again, is another type of *mondaine*, though Mrs. Tree's habitually fresh and pleasant tones seem constantly to belie her heartless utterances. Mr. Tree's Lord Illingworth is, on the other hand, a thoroughly artistic and finished portrait of the cynical voluptuary to whose share fall some of the epigrams that will be best remembered.

With these, it must be confessed, are not a few that appeal to the ear rather than the understanding. The suggestion that the American expression, "dry goods," may mean "American novels," the definition of women as "sphinxes without secrets," the Brummellian maxim that "a well-tied tie is the first serious step in life," and the description of the Peerage, with reference of course to its genealogies, as "the best thing in fiction the English have done," may amuse. But what can we make of such observations as "There are only two kinds of women—plain and coloured," Do plain women, then, never resort to the rouge-pot? Again, "A fox-hunt is the unspeakable in full pursuit of the unreatable." Why are foxhunters to be called "the unspeakable"? Again, "The difference between a saint and sinner is that the saint has a past and the sinner a future." Why may not the sinner, too, have a past? By way of further samples from the lips of various personages take, "If America is a paradise, why are Americans so anxious to get out of it?" "Nowadays it's only the unreadable that occurs." "My cigars are so awfully expensive, I can only afford them when I'm in debt." "One should always kiss women who lecture one." "The soul is born old, and grows young; that is life's comedy." "One can survive every thing except death." "All the men are married women's property: that's the only true meaning of women's property." "Nothing should surprise us nowadays except happy marriages." "A man should always say more than he means, and always mean more than he says." "Duty's what we expect from others; we don't do it ourselves." "The tyranny of women is the worst kind of tyranny the world has ever known—the tyranny of the weak over the strong; it is the only tyranny that lasts." "The uneducated are the only people who should be allowed to have votes." "Men marry because they are tired, women because they are curious." "Making love is the privilege of people who have nothing to do—the one use of the idle classes in this country." "Talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bores you." "It is wonderful what a many things are said of one behind one's back which are absolutely true." "The man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world." "At London dinner-parties clever people never listen and stupid people never talk." "If one wants to know what a woman really means one must look at her and not listen to her." "The happiness of a married man depends on the women he has not married." "A bad man is the sort of man who admires innocence; a bad woman the sort of woman a man never gets tired of." "Nothing succeeds like excess." These sayings, together with many more of the kind, consumed no inconsiderable part of the three hours and a quarter devoted to the representation. They made a first-night audience laugh; but they hardly bear the test of a pencil-note on the programme for reading the next morning.

MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY, "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE," AT THE HAYMARKET.
Mrs. Arbuthnot: "*Gerald, it is your father.*"

[illegible] recognisable by mistake for the [illegible] of a disposal-room. So when Mr. Alexander is heard ransacking a box-room, and when he reappears with the bag which is to establish his identity as a man of aristocratic lineage, the delight in a certain part of the theatre knows no bounds. Less literal playgoers are more amused by the colloquy between Mr. Alexander and Miss Rose Leclercq, who points out to him that a suitor for her daughter's hand cannot expect that young lady to marry into a cloak-room. The most successful situation in the farce is the appearance [illegible] spirit of whimsical comedy if not in Miss Rose Leclercq? All the characters talk Mr. Oscar Wilde's proverbial wisdom quite naturally, and I am not in the least surprised when a butler, enlightening his master, ascribes the extravagant consumption of champagne by servants in a bachelor's household to the superiority of the brand. In such a fantasy the maxims which Mr. Wilde produces with such ease from a rather familiar pattern, if not all of equal merit, are thoroughly at home.

A.