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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 3

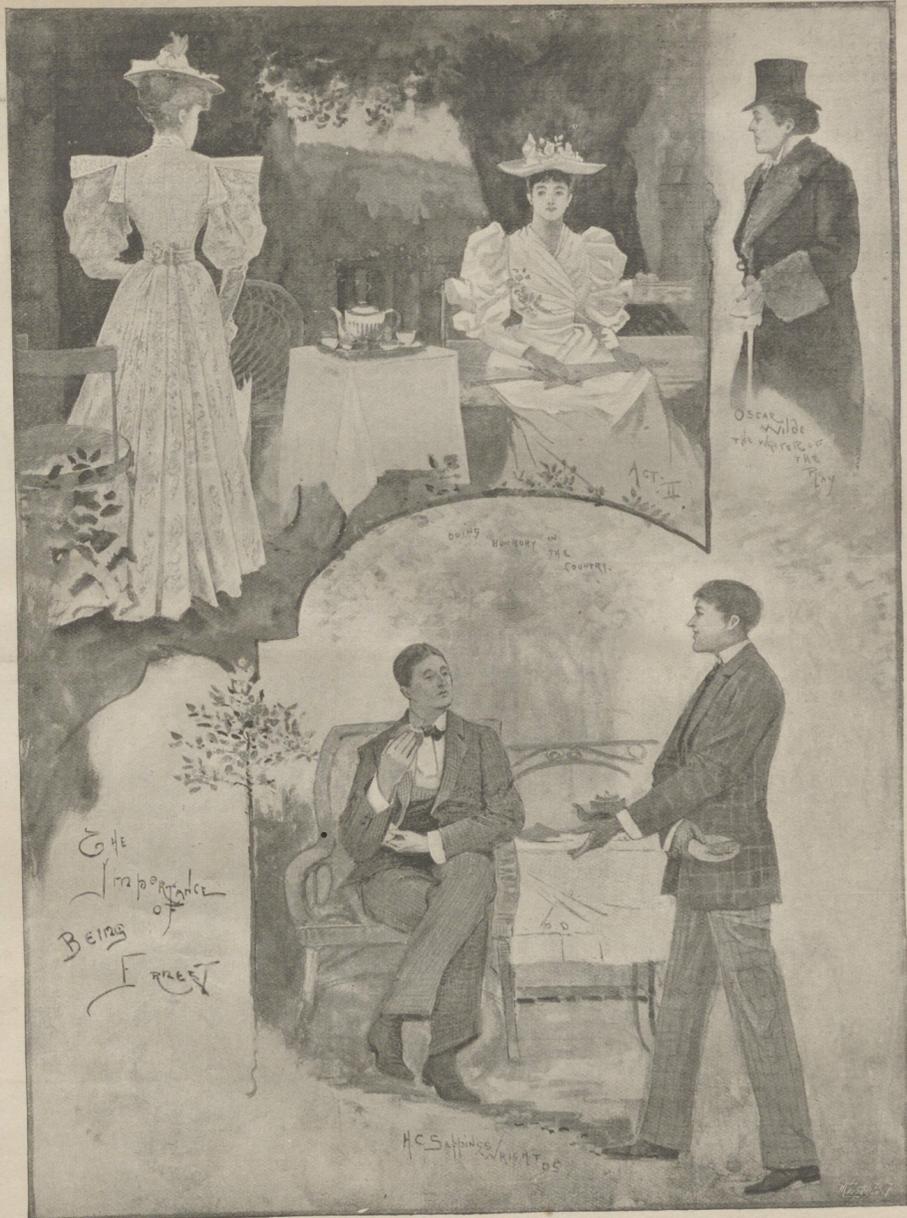
look of it corresponded with the reality. Was it wisdom, was it caution, was it timidly passing for one, formed a distinct impression from something of published despatches. Direct and frequent observation deeply anxious and troublesome time when Lord Derby as foreign Secretary in Mr. Disraeli's Cabinet might tremble to extremes under the influence of nervous temperament. At the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War, his conduct and his language were both at their boldest. From thence to the end they gradually but steadily declined. The change in him was as visible from point to point as falling mercury in a thermometer. But it is no fair inference from this, of course, that caution became cowardice as the imbrogllo deepened and responsibilities pressed in. As time went on, Lord Derby have seen better reasons for allowing the Russians their own way than had come out at the beginning; and when his conduct at that time is again in question it should be known that the opposition in Mr.

make a powerful and impressive drama. Does it? The question is not answered by dwelling on the disposition of Mr. Oscar Wilde's paradoxical dialogue to his dramatic action. Nor is it "very helpful," as one of Mr. Wilde's most amusing ladies would say, to point out that the situation in which Lord Illingworth's real relation to Gerald Arbuthnot is suddenly revealed in "Felix Holt" of a quarrel between two men, and the elder exclaims, when the younger is about to strike him, "Do—I am your father!" They are standing in front of a mirror, and, turning to the glass, the son perceives for the first time the hateful resemblance which tells the shameful secret of his birth. Mr. Oscar Wilde may have had this vaguely in his mind, just as he may have been unconsciously prompted to make Lord Illingworth admire his boy's spirit in resenting the liberty which the father tries to take with the pretty Puritan by Becky Sharpe's

involuntary admiration of her husband when he surprises her with Steyne. But these reminiscences and partial repetitions would in no way detract from Mr. Wilde's play if his principal personages were spontaneous and substantial. Mrs. Arbuthnot is consistent enough, and the trouble is that the part is pitched on one dolorous note which demands from the actress almost incredible intensity and concentration, to keep your eye from wandering after her train, and your mind from straying through the labyrinth of her twenty years of woe. On the other hand, it is fair to say that Mrs. Bernard Beere is steadily strengthening her grip of a very arduous task. It is not her fault that she has to strike Mr. Tree in the face with his own glove, a climax which is a gross injustice to both. With admirable art Mr. Tree has indicated the dawn of paternal pride in his suddenly discovered son. The emotion may not be very deep, but it is genuine. The libertine is not a penitent, but he is ready to make what he thinks sufficient amends. When he says to Mrs. Arbuthnot, "I want my son," he is manifestly sincere, and within certain narrow limits, he is still a gentleman. Up to this point Mr. Tree has conscientiously and skilfully embodied a character from very shadowy materials, till, without the slightest warrant or warning, the laborious structure is shattered in an instant. The polished room background, who offers an admirable insult both to mother and son, and is slashed across the face in the middle of it. If there was any expectation in the author's mind that this would carry the horse by storm he must have been rudely undeceived. The incident is utterly wrong, it excites nothing but disagreeable surprise, it rouses no sympathy for the insulted woman, and it completely spoils Mr. Tree's exit from the play. Unfortunately, this is not the whole mischief. The beneficent fairy of the story is the American maid. She listens in the background to the conversation of ladies whose philosophy of life is to "play with fire" because the artist has the joy of getting stung, while only the bungling parrot to whom all women should talk. Into the midst of it surges the neat-up earnestness of New England—a very remote New England—with an appeal to the law which visits the sins of the fathers upon the child. This type of American maiden may be so rare as to claim kindred with white elephants. At all events, having found the treasure, Mr. Wilde can make nothing of her except as a rhetorical device. She is a sort of alarm of morality which rings at intervals, and ends the drama with a good resounding peal; but of character she conveys little or no idea. This is partly due to Miss Julia Neilson's inexperience, but she is not responsible for the crudity which plants her at a window in the last act for

twenty minutes in the attitude of beauty waiting for the cue to strike the hour of benediction. With all its faults, "A Woman of No Importance" has some provoking merits. Its central conception is worthy of intelligent discussion, and it has a claim to be regarded as a comedy of manners. Much of it is a promenade of paradoxes, and there are numberless bypaths of epigram, which lead nowhere. But one unquestionable success is the character of Lady Ines, excellently played by Miss Alice. In spite of the glib, good-minded, irresponsible delivery of Mr. Henry James's story, what life only as a coveted staircase. The description of the ideal husband, which Mrs. Tree delivers with perfect point, would alone make the reputation of a writer of dialogue; and a play which is full of equally diverting matter is a most welcome entertainment, whatever its defects as a work of art.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE." There are different ways of treating Mr. Oscar Wilde's play at the Haymarket; but some critics may recognise the dramatist's purpose in reading society a lesson by contrasting the acceptance in depravity with the ethical code of a New England maiden who preaches in a drawing-room, and by a timely benison (not unaccompanied by dollars) unites a sinning mother and a slightly bewildered son. Nay, more, you may perceive that Mr. Oscar Wilde has not read Mr. Stead without profit, and that, in lieu of the social law which offers incense to the hardened prodigal who, in an impulse of gracious condescension, proposes to marry the woman he has ruined and deserted, you have in this play another moral standard, which subjects the seducer to the humiliation of being driven, even by an actual blow, out of the woman's life. The idea is not absolutely novel, but we have a suspicion that many playgoers at the Haymarket resented the contemptuous dismissal of this man, his cheek tingling with the sounding buffet administered by the lady. The resources of womanly forgiveness are conventionally supposed to be inexhaustible. Besides, we doubt whether the refusal of Mrs. Arbuthnot in the play to accept the conventional reparation can be regarded as quite proper by scrupulous decorum, especially after her declaring such previous compensation in the boy she adores. In this scene, which is certainly written with no little eloquence, we have the vindication of maternal love against the coarse wit of the old maid; who, now expects his personal sacrifice to be made with the society which would make marriage with the wreck of the salvation of the wreck. The Puritan de Gaulle demanded the equal punishment of women who sin and men who sin with them, but is converted by these incidents to the milder doctrine that women who have the spirit to shake off the contamination of their fellow-sinners are entitled to a comfortable and dignified home. Here, surely, is a perfectly defensible thesis which might



"THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST," MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE. See "Our Illustrations."

"THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST." The eclipse of Mr. George Alexander's fortunes at the St. James's Theatre has been very brief. To the delicate, but unhappily obscure comedy of Mr. Henry James has succeeded a piece of delightful nonsense by Mr. Oscar Wilde. In this case, at all events, there can be no quarrel between Mr. Wilde and his critics about his dramatic psychology, for "The Importance of Being Earnest" is pure farce, and offers no problem whatever to the analytic mind of the average playgoer. The author has very adroitly provided fun for people who laugh easily and for people who are more fastidious. It is not everybody who, having been told that the hero was found when a baby in a black bag in a cloak-room at a railway-station, is eager to see the bag. On the other hand, there are humorists who do not fully grasp this entertaining idea till the bag is presented to their gaze, with the initials of the governess who inadvertently put the baby into this receptacle by mistake for the manuscript of a three-volume novel. 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 suiton 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

of Mr. Alexander in deep mourning for the loss of an imaginary brother who at that moment is personated by Mr. Allan Aynesworth in the course of an adventure described as "Bunburying." Bunbury is a mythical friend who has a habit of summoning Mr. Aynesworth to his sick bed when that young gentleman finds it convenient to disappear. I seem to recognise in Bunbury a device that has done duty in bygone plays. In "Pink Dominoes," for instance, it was the state of the cotton market at Manchester that compelled a flighty gentleman to make a pretence of leaving town on the receipt of a telegram which ran, "Keep your eye on Surat!" But if Mr. Wilde has not invented an absolutely new deception for the purposes of farce, his Bunbury is a delicious notion for all that, and it is handled with precisely the right touch of irresponsibility by Mr. Aynesworth, whose mercurial genius even includes the capacity for eating muffins as if they were air. There is an excellent contrast between this *insouciance* and Mr. Alexander's demure gravity; and where shall we look for the 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.

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.

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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 unteachable.” 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.

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THE GRAPHIC

APRIL 29, 1893

“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 common-places 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 up lifted 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's little more than suggests Jissen Women's University Library

HAYMARKET THEATRE.—Lessee and Manager, Mr. HERBERT 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 Thiere, Miss Horlock, and Mrs. Bernard-Beere; Mr. Fred Terry, Mr. Kemble, Mr. Allan, Mr. Clark, &c. MATINEE TO-DAY and EVERY SATURDAY. Box-office (Mr. Leverton) open 10 to 5 and 8 to 10. Seats may be booked by letter or telegram. HAYMARKET THEATRE.

HAYMARKET.—MR. WALLER and MR. MORELL, Managers. AN IDEAL HUSBAND, by OSCAR WILDE. EVERY EVENING, at 8.30. EVERY WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY, at 2.30. Box Office (Mr. Leverton), 10 till 5. Sole Lessee, MR. TREE. HAYM

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MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY, "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE," AT THE HAYMARKET.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT: "*Gerald, it is your father!*"

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Coolidge? All the characters fall in. Oscar

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receiptable by mistake for the manuscript of
a three-volume novel. So when Mr. Alexander



2019-03-17 "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST." MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE.

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"THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST."

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a bachelor's household to the superiority of the brand. In such a fantasy the maxims which Mr. Wilde produces with such ease are not all of equal merit, are thoroughly at home.

A.

THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS

SEPTEMBER, 1890.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. 2s. 6d.
A Private Soldier on the Private Soldier's Wrongs. ARTHUR V. PALMER.
Mutual Aid among Animals. PRINCE KRAPOTKIN.
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Behind the Scenes in English Politics. THE LATE NASSAU W. SENIOR.
A Pompeii for the Twenty-ninth Century. BY FREDERIC HARRISON.
American Railways and British Factories. J. STEPHEN JEANS.
Bion of Smyrna. W. MORTON FULLERTON.
Water in Australian Sahara. THE HON. T. A. BRASSEY.
On Criticism: with some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing. (Concluded.) OSCAR WILDE.

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THE OBITER DICTA OF MR. OSCAR WILDE.

Mr. Oscar Wilde, in the concluding part of his long and brilliant paper on "The true function of criticism of Vigour," italicizes his most characteristic sayings. I quote a few as samples of the Wisdom of Wilde:—
All Art is immoral, for emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of Art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life and of that practical organization of life that we call society.

Let me say to you now that to do anything at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual.

Yes. All the arts are immoral, for action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of Art is simply to create a mood.

The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try and make oneself useful.

An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

It is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it.

FEBRUARY, 1891.

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW. 2s. 6d.

February.
Russian Finance: The Ricking of the Peasantry. "E. B. LANIN."
Public Life and Private Morals. "M."
An Island Deer-Forest.
The Road to Social Peace. SIR HENRY FOTTING, B.
The Farms and Trotting-Horses of Kentucky. THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH.
The Celt in English Art. GHAIST ALLEN.
Decorative Electric Lighting.
Critics "Over the Coast." MRS. J. E. H. GORDON.
The Soul of Man under Socialism. WILLIAM ARCHER.
OSCAR WILDE.

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MR. OSCAR WILDE ON CHRISTIANITY.

There is a very wonderful article, entitled "The Soul of Man under Socialism," in which Mr. Oscar Wilde indulges in large discourse for the space of thirty pages. Mr. Oscar Wilde has written about many things, but it will surprise most of his friends to find him coming out, like the Duke of Marlborough, as an interpreter of Christianity:—

"Know thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be thyself." That is the secret of Christ.

His last word is that the new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, willingly or unwillingly, is working, is the new Hellenism. The worship of pain has hitherto dominated the world; the Individualism which Christ brought can only be realised through pain and in solitude. The Individualism of the future will develop itself through joy. Even now, in some places in the world, the message of Christ is necessary—in Russia, for instance. There, the Nihilist is the real Christian, and the medieval Christ is the real Christ. There are a good many other paradoxes, after Mr. Oscar Wilde's customary pattern.

57

1894.

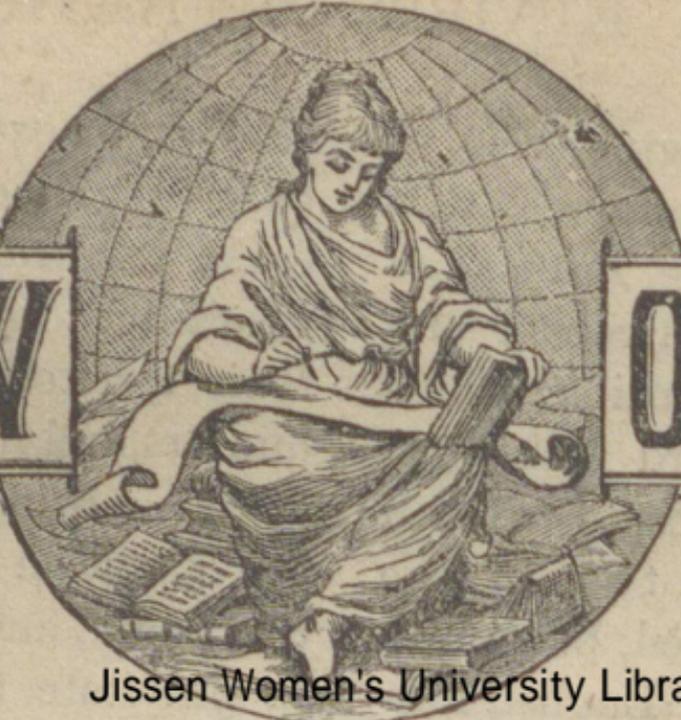
Fortnightly Review.—Chapman and Hall. July. 2s. 6d.
Socialism and Natural Selection. KARL PEARSON.
Poems in Prose. OSCAR WILDE.

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THE PRODUCTION OF MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY, "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE," AT THE HAYMARKET THEATRE
Mrs. Arbuthnot (Mrs. Bernard Beere), in reply to the taunts of Lord Illingworth (Mr. Beerbohm-Tree), strikes him across the face with his gloves—ACT IV.

THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS

A central illustration of a woman in classical attire sitting on a globe. She is holding an open book and looking down at it. A long scroll lies across her lap. Several books are scattered on the ground around her. The globe behind her shows latitude and longitude lines.

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Behind the Scenes in English Politics.
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J. STEPHEN JEANS.
Bion of Smyrna. W. MORTON FULLERTON.
The Hon. T. A. BRASSEY.
On Criticism: with some Remarks on the
Importance of Doing Nothing. (Con-
cluded.) OSCAR WILDE.

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THE OBITER DICTA OF MR. OSCAR WILDE.

Mr. Oscar Wilde, in the concluding part of his long and brilliant paper on "The true function of criticism of Vigour," italicizes his most characteristic sayings. I quote a few as samples of the Wisdom of Wilde:—

All Art is immoral, for emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of Art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life and of that practical organization of life that we call society.

Let me say to you now that to do anything at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual.

Yes. All the arts are immoral, for action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of Art is simply to create a mood.

The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try and make oneself useful.

An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

It is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it.

FEBRUARY, 1891.

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW. 2s. 6d.

February.

Russian Finance: The Racking of the Peasantry. "E. B. LANIN."

Public Life and Private Morals. "M."

An Island Deer-Forest.

Sir HENRY POTTING. R.

The Road to Social Peace.

DAVID F. SCHLOSS.

The Farms and Trotting-Horses of Kentucky. The DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH.

The Celt in English Art. GRANT ALLEN.

Decorative Electric Lighting.

Critics "Over the Coals." G. E. H. GORDON.

The Soul of Man under Socialism. WILLIAM ARCHER.

Oscar WILDE.

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Mrs. Arbuthnot (Mrs. Bernard Beere), in reply to the taunts of Lord Illingworth (Mr. Beerbohm-Tree), strikes him across the face with his gloves—ACT IV.

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

LIEUTENANT OSCAR WILDE AND HIS MERRY FOLKS. EVERY EVENING.



"A PLAY OF NO IMPORTANCE."

If I had to sum up *A Woman of No Importance* in three words I should describe it as Christy Ministerialism crystallised. Mr. Oscar Wilde's methods are more polished than those of Mr. George Washington Moore, and more authoritative, but that is all. It is impossible to regard the Haymarket entertainment as a play. The characters are so many names for a single personality—the author himself. They have been wound up and they go off scattering fit-bits much in the same tone, and all at the same tension. Instead of being called Lord Illingworth, Mrs. Alonby, Hester Worsley, and so on, they might more properly be labelled Oscar Wilde I, 2, 3, &c. I speak with reference, of course, to what they say, not to what they do, which is indeed quite a sublimated matter in presence of the all assertive dialogue. No doubt this dialogue is a success. It is creditable alike to Mr. Wilde's wide reading, to his imagination, and to his ingenuity. It abounds with epigrams, some of which are fresh, and all of which come as surprises to those who have not read, and with paradoxes which have at least the merit of audacity. It appeals with special force to a generation which ignores literary — which ignores Balzac, Lytton and has not dipped into the French novelists of the Restoration period. The opinions, and way of expressing them, of Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Alonby do not come with so much surprise to those who remember the Bastagnas and de Marsays of *La Vie Parisienne*. However, Mr. Wilde must not be denied a large amount of originality. If there are times when he gives us truisms in a new form, there are others when he elaborates a happy thought of his own. And others again when the idea is not very happy—a direct proof that he has exercised his invention. It could be wished that he had found a plot as easily as he has found epigram. There is very little dramatic interest in *A Woman of No Importance*, and but a couple of incidents—which will be recognised as familiar affects. These are the contemptuous refusal of the woman who has been wronged to marry her betrayer; and the sudden revelation of his parentage to the son who is about to strike his father. How many variations have been played upon this kind of situation



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OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

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SUGGESTED

2019-03-17 DESIGN FOR A POSTER

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"Place aux Dames"

By LADY VIOLET GREVILLE

Men are often instinctively right in their taste without knowing why. An instance of this may be cited in their predilection for black or white in women's dress. Compared with the garish and dazzling colours of the frivolous ladies in Mr. Oscar Wilde's new play, the simple black worn by Mrs. Bernard Beere, and the grey and white dresses of Miss Neilson, looked positively refined and distinguished. They seemed to belong to another more delicate sphere of womanhood, where all was quiet, subdued, and instinct with exquisite grace. I have often noticed this effect in a ballroom, where the women dressed in black or in white seemed to stand out in relief, with their beauty accentuated. It is the brilliant background that produces this excellent result. Sombre dresses in a dingy street, on a grey November day, are destitute of beauty. They need contrast, and then it is that the ruddy rays of a street-lamp, a woman's scarlet bonnet, the bunch of daffodils in a flower-girl's basket, give just the true touch of colour, the necessary contrast to make a picture. But set a beautiful woman dressed in black in a dazzling frame and her beauty becomes distinguished and unique immediately. No doubt this is what men feel when they tell a woman to dress in black, for then she is sure to be well dressed. The coloured dresses in the play were exaggerated in colour. They were overdone in gaudiness, and thus the necessary relief of shadow afforded by the black became doubly grateful. It is not every woman who cares to dress so as to be a foil to her friend's beauty, yet that is what happens when in the midst of the multicoloured hues of some vast assembly a handsome blonde in black passes among the rainbow tints. Where the brightest light is, there must be the deepest shadow. So in the Park, or at the play, there is always a pretty young widow to fascinate men's gaze.

The morality *versus* the dresses of the new play at the Haymarket seemed to take the audience by surprise. The cutting brilliancy of "the nice derangement of epitaphs" fell somewhat flat; *per contra*, the Ibsenish tendency of the sombre story affected them deeply. The conventional idea that women who are sinners must suffer is well understood; but that men should suffer too, that the sympathy of the son and his innocent young bride should be with the woman, that was a new view of the matter which puzzled and displeased. Men's brows were puckered, men's hands twitched, they fidgeted. Is the era of woman's equality really at hand, is the dawn of their supremacy really on the horizon? The hardened male reprobate who, having tasted and tired of all life's pleasures, feels lonely in loveless isolation and wants his son, the son of the woman he has despised and cast off—this did not seem natural, and yet, perhaps, after all, was there something in it? Innumerable subtle touches of nature suggested new trains of thought. The boy who, after hearing his mother's sad story, says, "But, mother, you know, she could not have been a really nice girl." The *blaisé* man of the world, who remarks to the woman, after she has rejected him, "I believe you loved me more than any one else ever did." The man's gratified vanity at the affection he has so persistently despised, the delicately-suggested birth of his respect for her when he pulls out his cigarette-case in her presence, and, finally, after a moment's hesitation, puts it back again in his pocket, the half sad, half insolently jaunty, half baffled mode of his exit—all these were immensely piquant and effective. Still, on the whole, the men did not like it, and in that they were justified. It would never do for the weaker sex to realise that there would be an equality of justice for both sexes, and that men's rights are no longer women's wrongs.

Concerning "An Ideal Husband" the latest *on dit* is too good to forget before committing it to a sketchy immortality. Going the way of all play-acting manuscripts, accepted or otherwise, the "Husband" was sent by post to its author for a pruning that would fit in with Haymarket exigencies. Recognising the inevitable with sentiments that still approached a sigh, Oscar the Ostensible waved a violet-tipped cigarette in the air, and said, with a speechless air: "Who am I that I should mutilate a masterpiece?" There wasn't a dry eye in the company.

THE DRAMA OF THE WEEK.

"LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN" AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE.

MR. OSCAR WILDE'S play belongs to the school of which *The Red Lamp* is a conspicuous example. It is, like *The Red Lamp*, a play which owes its title and its theme to a piece of domestic furniture. In the one piece the fortunes of a Russian Princess depended upon the position of a lamp as scarlet as the cry of Montanaro's passionate parrot. In the other piece the fortunes of an Englishwoman depend upon the proprietorship of a fan as white as Lady Windermere's fortuitous innocence. As a rule, plays built up round some inanimate object are rather boring; but that could not be said of *The Red Lamp* or of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. On the contrary both are very amusing plays. Mr. Wilde's pictures of exalted London life are as faithful as Mr. Tristram's studies of St. Petersburg society; if Mr. Tristram was more adventurous, Mr. Wilde is more epigrammatic. Indeed, it is obvious that Mr. Wilde regards a play as a vehicle merely for the expression of epigram and the promulgation of paradox. *Lady Windermere's Fan* is not really a play; it is a pepper-box of paradoxes. The piece is improbable without being interesting. It is a not too ingenious blend of the *Eden* of Mr. Edgar Saltus, with *The Idler* of Mr. Haddon Chambers, and the *Francaillon* of Alexander Dumas the Younger. Its people act in an unnatural manner without arousing sympathy or hostility by their actions. The situations are weatherworn. But the paradox is the thing, not the play. The Great God Paradox has his impassioned prophet in Mr. Wilde and all Mr. Wilde's puppets chant his litany. It has a quaint effect to find, in this Cloud-Cuckoo-Town of Mr. Wilde's, all its inhabitants equally cynical, equally paradoxical, equally epigrammatic. Were the trick to become too stale it might prove tiresome, for it is, after all, but a question of inverted vocabulary. Mr. Wilde's figures talk a Back Slang of their own; once accept the conditions of the game, and the fantastic becomes the familiar. Black is white, day is night; well and good, by all means. But what next? While it is fresh, however, this kind of fantasy is exceedingly diverting; and its humours are interpreted at the St. James's after a fashion which must surely temper Mr. Wilde's disdain for actors. Miss Marion Terry played a part wholly new to her artistic experience with great skill, and with a grace that made the beholder forget how skilful the performance was in sheer enjoyment of its charm. Mr. Alexander,



MRS. ERLYNNE (MISS MARION TERRY) ENTREATING LADY WINDERMERE (MISS LILY HANBURY) TO RETURN TO HER HUSBAND

having modestly chosen a small part, made no false effort to play it into a big part. It was, from first to last firmly restrained within its due proportions. Mr. Nutcombe Gould had little opportunity as a peer of laboured profligacy. Mr. Ben Webster played a specimen of the Up To Date young man with rare distinction, exquisite foppishness, exquisite insolence. It was quite the best thing he has done, quite the best thing of its kind I have seen for long enough.

THE DRAMA OF THE DAY



"AN IDEAL HUSBAND,"

AT THE

HAYMARKET

THEATRE.

This Supplement, pages 1 to VIII, may be detached if desired.

"AN IDEAL HUSBAND," AT THE HAYMARKET THEATRE.



LADY CHILTERN (MISS JULIA NELLSON).

"What gain would you get—Money?"

Mr. Oscar Wilde's play, despite some unkind remarks of the critics, seems to have caught the taste of the public. In fact, the author has shown a skill in pleasing those whom he professes to despise which suggests the existence of a fellow-feeling between him and the middle classes that must be surprising and painful to him. The great uncultured has enjoyed Mr. Wilde's ornate imitation of Scribe as completely as its author, and everyone, from Balham to Belgravia, is going to see the strangely unlife-like story of Sir Robert Chiltern and the stolen bracelet. It is indeed fortunate that, in matters dramatic, Mr. Wilde is a man of no importance, or the theatres might be deluged with efforts of the untrained to copy the method of the skilful play-jugglers, Sardou and his master Scribe. However, one must give the author his due, and admit that he has succeeded in writing a capital part for the brilliant comedian Mr. Charles Hawtrej, and in providing the popular young managers, Messrs. Lewis Waller and H. H. Morell, with a play likely to fill the theatre, until Mr. Beerholm Tree's return, with people who will be delighted by a work that hits to perfection the taste of the British Philistine. The following is the cast—

- The Earl of Caversham MR. ALFRED BISHOP.
- Lord Goring MR. CHARLES H. HAWTREY.
- Sir Robert Chiltern MR. LEWIS WALLER.
- Vicomte de Nanjac MR. COSMO STUART.
- Mr. Montford MR. HENRY STANFORD.
- Phipps MR. C. H. BROOKFIELD.
- Mason MR. H. DEANE.
- Footman MR. CHARLES MEYRICK.
- Footman MR. GOODHART.
- Lady Chiltern MISS JULIA NELLSON.
- Lady Markby MISS FANNY BROUGH.
- Lady Basilidon MISS VANE FEATHERSTON.
- Mrs. Marchmont MISS HELEN FOHSEYTH.
- Miss Mabel Chiltern MISS MAUDE MILLETT.
- Mrs. Cheveley MISS FLORENCE WEST.



LORD GORING (MR. CHARLES HAWTREY), AND MISS MABEL CHILTERN.

LORD GORING: "It's a public scandal the way I adore you."



SIR ROBERT CHILTERN (MR. LEWIS WALLER) AND LORD GORING.

LORD GORING: "You thought you had won, Robert!"

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED ELLIS, UPPER BAKER STREET, N.W.



MISS CHILTERN (MISS MAUDE MILLETT).

"I wouldn't marry a man with a future."



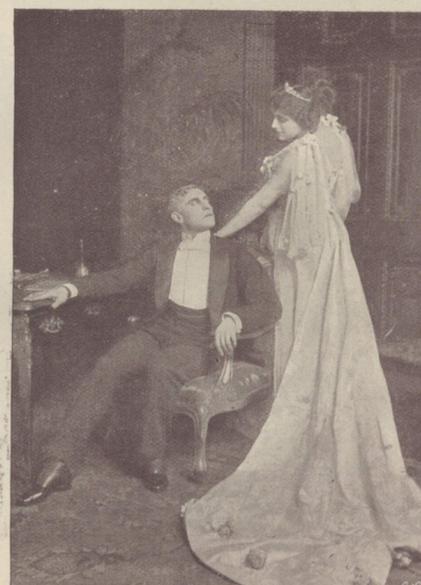
LADY BASILDON (MISS VANE FEATHERSTON), AND MRS. MARCHMONT.

"What martyrs we are, dear Margaret!"



LORD GORING AND MISS CHILTERN.

"I wonder who dropped it?"



SIR ROBERT AND LADY CHILTERN.

"Write the word 'dishonest.'"

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED ELLIS, UPPER BAKER STREET, N.W.



MISS JULIA NEILSON AS LADY CHILTERN.

"What has my husband to do with a woman like you?"

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY HANA, STRAND.

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LADY BASILDON AND MRS. MARCHMONT (MISS FORSYTH).

"What did your man talk about?"



SIR ROBERT AND LADY CHILTERN.

SIR ROBERT: *"Must I write and tell her that?"*



SIR ROBERT AND LADY CHILTERN.

SIR ROBERT: *"Love me always, Gertrude! Love me always!"*



LORD GORING AND LORD CAVERSHAM (MR. ALFRED BISHOP).

LORD CAVERSHAM: *"Have you read 'The Times' this morning?"*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED ELLIS, UPPER BAKER STREET, N.W.