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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 9

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

By OSCAR WILDE. [Revival.] Lord Illingworth... Mr. TREE Sir John Pontefract... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE

Times.

An interesting revival, and perhaps even of some importance. It will be important if it signifies that Mr. Tree is no longer to exclude modern comedy from the repertory of His Majesty's Theatre.

To the gist of the play, the story of Mrs. Arbuthnot and Lord Illingworth and their boy, ample justice was done. It strikes one perhaps "nowadays," as the author would say, to be a rather sentimentally treated story—the sentiment has reminiscences of the theatre of Angier and Dumas fils, which was inordinately fond of this particular theme—and the sentiment, moreover, rather jars with the cynicism of the other, or purely conversational, elements of the play.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE REVIVAL OF "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

By OSCAR WILDE. Lord Illingworth... Mr. Tree Sir John Pontefract... Mr. J. Fisher White

The irony of events has decreed that it is not the drama of Oscar Wilde's comedy which has aged since first we saw it years ago at the Haymarket Theatre, but the epigrammatic dialogue which in those days we thought marked the last cry in the art of the playwright.

The plot of "A Woman of No Importance" could be told in an hour upon the stage if the extraneous conversation were cut out. The woman wronged, the profligate father, the meeting after many years, the struggle between mother and father for the child.

ON THE MERSEY A VISIT TO LIVERPOOL AND A TRIP

PRINCE RUSHIMI

The new regulations, or rather the revised regulations, are being rigidly enforced in Edinburgh, and on several occasions prominent citizens have been requested by the police to take down the Royal Standard.

Morning Post, HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE"

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were many people who remembered the first play at the Haymarket on April 19, 1903, and a few of them regretted that the author was not present to witness the brilliant performance of Miss Tree as Hester Worsley. It is a most difficult part, and Miss Tree was the ideal interpretation of Hester.

On former occasions made observations on the excellence of the dramatic critics. But even the most ardent are entitled to their opinion, based though it may be on a deficient education. When, however, the critic, always an adept at suppressio veri, falls into a suggestio falsi, the actor-manager, if no one else, is entitled to interfere.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE"

As experiences there are more curious than that of witnessing, after a lapse of many years, the revival of a play which has served, in however small or large a degree, to make theatrical history.

amatic critic will deal next week with the revival of "A Woman of No Importance" at the Haymarket last. In the meanwhile we are glad that nearly all the morning papers gave a false impression of the evening.

Every one knew Miss Terry would be perfect. Not that Miss Viola Tree was the ideal interpretation of Hester.

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Comedy in Four Acts by Oscar Wilde.

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"A Woman of No Importance," one of the chief successes of Mr. Tree's Haymarket management, was revived last night at His Majesty's, and, despite a somewhat dragging performance, was received with unbounded applause.

When Mr. Beerbohm Tree left the Haymarket Theatre it seemed as though we lost one of our finest character-actors; or rather not lost but mislaid on the vast stage of His Majesty's.

worthy structural no doubt inner provision will take some six months to complete. For drawing of Woman of No Importance. W. A.

1907 DRAMA AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

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An interesting revival, and perhaps even of some importance. It will be important if it signifies that Mr. Tree is no longer to exclude modern comedy from the repertoire of His Majesty's Theatre. The curious will have observed an alteration of the proscenium-frame last night, which brings the stage-picture within reasonable dimensions. Doubtless this means that Mr. Tree and his company intend from time to time to be seen in modern plays constructed to the scale of ordinary life; and if that be so, why so much the better, as Mr. Tree and his company ought not to be restricted to one or two kinds of drama, but to take, if they choose, all drama for their province. Everybody last night was obviously interested in the new unusual spectacle of Mr. Tree in a modern play, and so to speak, in his own every-day clothes. A modern play? Well, the word "modern" is elastic enough to cover A Woman of No Importance, which certainly cannot be called "ancient." Of course it dates; if only because it so obviously belongs to a period upon which its author set his mark and which was not quite like any other period before or since. A word is constantly repeated in the course of the play is "nowadays"—a word that always has a curiously ironic ring a few years later. "Nowadays," says this or that character, people do or don't do—whatever it may be. Nowadays people don't talk in plays as Oscar Wilde made them talk—for one reason because there is no playwright among us capable of inventing that brilliant talk, and, for another, because playwrights would not be disposed to listen to it with enthusiasm. The truth is, a little of A Woman of No Importance there is far too much of it. The first act, for instance, is all epigram, and there is not a hint of the play to come until the final sentence. It would be interesting—on some other occasion—to trace the filiation of Oscar Wilde's dialogue. Obviously it owes something to the Disraelian novel. Less obviously, but still unmistakably, something to Thomas Love Peacock (for example, the passage in Act III. wherein each character tries to define "the secret of life" will be recognized, as in form, an old friend by all readers of "Crotchet Castle"). But the greater part, though not always the best part, is of the author's own invention—including such really good things as "Women are Sphinxes without secrets," and such deplorably mechanical things as "Nothing succeeds like excess." Whatever its merits and demerits, one thing is certain—it ought to come trippingly off the tongue. Mr. Tree and his company spoke it last night a little too consciously—had, in fact, a "difficult labour" with their epigrams. This, however, is a shortcoming which will probably disappear in a couple of performances. To the gist of the play, the story of Mrs. Arbuthnot and Lord Illingworth and their boy "nowadays," as the author would say, to be a rather sentimentally treated story—the sentiment has reminiscences of the theatre of Augier and Dumas fils, which was inordinately fond of this particular theme—and the sentiment, moreover, rather jars with the cynicism of the other, or purely conversational, elements of the play. It is as though the author were continually shifting his point of view; holding a candle to the devil in his lighter passages and then atoning for that freak by a certain exaggeration of sentiment in the serious part of his story. The effect is a little disconcerting. But the great point is that it is always an exhilarating effect. The play is never dull, and is often really brilliant. It is capably acted. Miss Marion Terry gets a chance of pouring out all her sweetness, Mr. Tree is bright and incisive, Miss Tree a charmingly sincere ingénue, and Mrs. Calvert a richly comic dowager. The audience seemed thoroughly pleased with the whole entertainment.

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The irony of events has decreed that it is not the drama of Oscar Wilde's comedy which has aged since first we saw it years ago at the Haymarket Theatre, but the epigrammatic dialogue which in those days we thought marked the last cry in the art of the playwright. It was the artificiality of the brilliant talk which "dated" "A Woman of No Importance" on its revival at His Majesty's Theatre last night. The story, simple to a degree, gripped the attention and held the great audience enchained, because of its pathos, its humanity, and its drama—it was the "effective situation" which aroused the enthusiasm; and it was the clever, but irrelevant witticisms—sparked they never so brightly, causing a continual ripple of laughter through the evening as they did—which, nevertheless, were plainly felt to be holding back the plot and delaying the action. It is the drama, the plot, the action of Wilde's comedy which went home last night. The qualities of the theatre, not of the writer of epigrams, were the qualities which held and which were accountable for the enthusiasm which marked the revival of a play which at its birth was held to be first and foremost a comedy of dialogue. It is along these lines that we have progressed—dialogue, nowadays, does not strain after effect, it must be natural, direct, and it must develop the story. No longer are we willing to watch the characters of a play seated around a room shooting off fireworks at each other, but those fireworks as stimulating, as clever, and as pungent as those of Wilde. Of course, there is no need now to write them—but, had he lived, it is almost certain that a dramatist with his force and his superb simplicity of action—a curious contrast to his extravagance and effort in language—would have subordinated the quality which we prize most foremost to the quality he affected to despise—the power of telling a human story dramatically. The plot of "A Woman of No Importance" could be told in an hour upon the stage if the extraneous conversations were cut out. The woman wronged, the prodigal father, the meeting after many years, the struggle between mother and father for the child. Even in so short a space could the author have drawn for us no less admirably than he has done the characters of the decadent Lord Illingworth, cynic and loose liver, and the egotist, who meets years after the woman he wronged, the lovely woman, beautifully conceived, Mrs. Arbuthnot. Illingworth has already met his son, and not knowing him, been drawn to him, and offered him the post of private secretary. Joyfully the boy accepts, and when, his mother and father having met, she asks her son to give up the bright dreams which have come to him, he temporarily is estranged from her, and the triumph seems again to be the man's. Illingworth, still utterly and entirely selfish, and, knowing now the truth, presses his advantage, and is ready to do this further evil thing—to take from her her son. It is only when Illingworth, to win a wager, insults the Puritan American girl, Gerald Arbuthnot's love, that the boy's eyes are opened, and he casts the father off. The confession of the mother to her son of his parentage and all that led to it is only one among many exquisite pieces of natural writing which alternate continually with the affected smartness of the lighter portions of the play. Too late Illingworth would make amends—still actuated by selfishness merely, still a cad, and still a brute, though he may hide it ever so carefully, and scorns. It is, indeed, simple tale, but, in its essentials, it is superbly told. Irritated as we are by the trivial, though sparkling, clevernesses of the dialogue of the scenes which do not matter, in those that do the author never falters and never errs. There are moments in this play of the most delightful sincerity and feeling. The character of the American girl, for all her preachiness, is fragrant, honest, and sweet, and the playwright has very cleverly contrasted her faith and her ideals with the base egotism of some and the callous and indifferent "smartness" of others of his characters. The piece is finely interpreted at His Majesty's. Miss Marion Terry, despite a certain hesitation, proved once again that she is an incomparable artist in her own genre. The pathetic naturalness of her acting, its gentle simplicity and quiet scorn, deservedly won for the actress the chief triumph of the evening. Mr. Tree, also a little uncertain of his lines, played with an admirable sense of character the part of Illingworth. Every phase of the man was shown us—his graceful refinement, his brutality, his coarseness, and his superficial refinement, the almost animal affection and fierce desire for his son. Mr. Tree presents a finished picture. Miss Viola Tree acted with much charm as Hester Worsley, the American girl; the sympathetic quality of her voice and her unaffected manner were very welcome. Miss Ellis Jeffreys sparkled through the piece as a typical "smart" woman, who has so many clever things to say, and says them in the grand "style." Mrs. Charles Calvert, as Lady Hunstanton, gives us another of those delightful old women which never cease to amuse, from their verbal crispness and their sluggish intelligence. Mr. Charles Quartermaine, as Gerald, acted sincerely; and Miss Kate Cutler, as Lady Stutfield, could not have been more innately natural.

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A crowded and brilliant audience last night extended a warm welcome to Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of No Importance." In the fourteen years which have elapsed since the production at the Haymarket many things have happened. Not the least important is the rise of Mr. Bernard Shaw, who, while delighting no less than his countryman in perversity, has taught audiences to expect more to be done for them. Not all the epigrams heard last night are of the best, and some which required the mind to meet them half-way did not go so well as in the old days, when such things were the staple of conversation and everybody was on the look-out for them. Mr. Shaw is at pains to drive his points home. Of the two playwrights he hits the harder, but most of his hits are straight in front of him, and he has not the variety of strokes or the delicate and subtle wrist-play of his rival. Some of the quiet "glances" of last night passed unheeded. Yet on the whole the dialogue—and two-thirds of the play is dialogue but remotely connected with the little action there is—told well, and for the most leisurely, the audience laughed most heartily. The most dramatic act—the third, in which, Gerald Arbuthnot is only kissing the puritan American girl by his mother's telling him that Illingworth is his father—gripped the attention of the audience, and at its finish the curtain had to be raised and lowered many times. Mr. Tree has put the piece on very handsomely, the drawing-room scene being most beautiful, while the garden scene, in which pass the second and third acts, is a model of quiet and tasteful luxury. Mr. Tree has not been as successful as usual in engaging members of the original cast. He repeats, of course, his admirable impersonation of Illingworth, calm, imperturbable, and suavely insolent, and gives the utmost point to the audacious sallies in which Illingworth specialises. His cool, assured and graceful, almost fascinating demeanour is wonderfully maintained. The only other member of the original cast is Mr. Charles Kelvil, who reappears as the pompous, platitudinous politician Kelvil. Miss Marion Terry in Mrs. Bernard Beese's old part, Mrs. Arbuthnot, acts with unfeeling charm, tenderness and sympathy. Her sorrow and her passion are alike dignified. Mr. Charles Quartermaine is frank, bright, and pleasing as the son, and as Hester Worsley Miss Viola Tree sings extremely well. She acts, too, with sincerity, but both the nationality and the character of the American girl seem to elude her grasp. Mrs. Charles Calvert causes much amusement as the fatuous old Lady Hunstanton. Miss Ellis Jeffreys is delightfully buoyant and piquant as Mrs. Allenby, and Miss Kate Bishop as Lady Caroline and Miss Kate Cutler as Lady Stutfield materially contribute to the evening's success. A very clever performance is given by Mr. Edmund Maurice as the Rector; it was hugely enjoyed, but suffers somewhat from being too farcical for the tone of the play. "A Woman of No Importance" will be repeated next Mr. Tree will give a matinee of "Hamlet," in which he will be supported by Miss Viola Tree as Ophelia and Mrs. Russ Whytal as the Queen.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Few experiences there are more curious than that witnessing, after a lapse of many years, the revival of a play which has served, in howsoever small or great a degree, to make theatrical history. On such occasions there must always be a mental effort to constitute the original scene, an attempt to throw oneself back into the atmosphere and to re-create a feeling of other days. At the same time, it is possible to resist the appeal of the present moment. What a happy phrase, what a brilliant paradox was "A Woman of No Importance" when it was first produced. The spectator will say under his breath, only a faint later to find himself in the act of deliberating whether, after all, the phrase was quite so happy, the paradox quite so brilliant, as he originally imagined. Does change and we with them; there is no denying a crash of the Latin adage. On the other hand, how stimulating, how refreshing, it is to discover that the pleasure which a play, a scene, or a picture once afforded us is as strong, as real, and as sure as ever. Something of all this an expectant audience which last night awaited the lifting of the curtain on "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's must have felt. Would the dramatic critic will deal next week with the play at a Woman of No Importance at the Haymarket Wednesday last. In the meanwhile we are to record that with the exception of the Times and nearly all the morning papers gave a false of the evening. Whatever the opinions may be as to the author, the fact remains that the play was enthusiastically received. We have heard of dramatic daily papers who leave after the first act and go to Fleet Street. On Wednesday one of them spent a whole time in the bar of the theatre writing his letter the first Act; he did not return to the auditorium until the middle of the fourth Act.

When Mr. Beerbohm Tree left the Haymarket Theatre it seemed as though we lost one of our finest character-actors; or rather not lost but mislaid on the vast stage of His Majesty's. Neither Shakespeare nor scenery nor Mr. Stephen Phillips was any compensation. But now that the proscenium can be made smaller there seems some chance of our being able to enjoy drama and acting once more. Who knows that we may not even enjoy Shakespeare again? The revival of Oscar Wilde's Woman of No Importance with an unusually brilliant caste has thrown considerable light on the state of the drama and dramatic criticism, and on contemporary taste. It proves that Wilde was the only literary playwright since Sheridan whose dramas command any degree of popular attention, and that in artificial comedy he has never been replaced. Mr. Bernard Shaw and the literary group of Court dramatists have never been tested for long runs, at least in England, and of them Mr. St. John Hankin alone is a derivative of Oscar Wilde's. An insufficient acquaintance with Mr. Shaw's plays, or perhaps with Wilde's, induces some of the critics to suggest that Mr. Shaw belongs or belonged to the same school. Both were men of letters, both were Irish, and there the resemblance ceases. Wilde was never influenced by Ibsen; he was only interested: he never took the trouble to acquire what for England was the new technique. Some of the critics point out that constructively his plays were old-fashioned when they were produced. That is actually true and it is for this reason, perhaps that they have all the freshness and the old fashion of Congreve and Sheridan. Just as Mr. Samuel Pepys thought poorly of Hamlet when it was revived at the end of the seventeenth century, Wilde's plays do not appeal to some of the critics, especially if they happen to be playwrights themselves. With the exception of "Ernest," none of them ever had a "good press," and this is ascribed to the author making a character (in one of his stories), say "that all the dramatic critics were to be bought, but to judge by their appearance they could not be very expensive." The number of times

were many people who remembered the first play at the Haymarket on April 19, 1893, and a few of them regretted that the author was not present to witness the brilliant performance of Miss Viola Tree as Hester Worsley. It is a most difficult part, and Miss Tree realised to a supreme degree the full lines she had to say, and Miss Marion Terry course, born for the "purple patches" of Wilde's Every one knew Miss Tree would be perfect. Not that Miss Viola Tree was the ideal impersonation of Hester. We have on former occasions made observations on the nature of the dramatic critics. But even the most ardent are entitled to their opinion, based though it may be on a deficient education. When, however, the critic, always an adept at suppressio veri, falls into the error of suggesting falsi, the actor-manager, if no one else, is to interfere. Any one present at His Majesty's on Wednesday night must have rubbed his eyes and wondered to see the Daily Mail on the following day. The account of the evening given by "K. H." in the Daily Mail's account of, say, the Colonial Exhibition. The curtain was raised four times after the first Act, and twice after each preceding Act. Mr. Tree called upon for a speech and each of the actors individually, repeatedly called before the footlights, to form a "Society of Dramatic Critics" and to inquire into the conduct of "K. H.," if by chance a member of that body. That a fifth-rate playwright should be called upon to give a matinee of "Hamlet," the author of vulgar suburban stories should be a record at all is only another of the amazing features of Mr. Beerbohm Tree's amazing organ.

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"A Woman of No Importance," one of the chief successes of Mr. Tree's Haymarket management, was revived last night at His Majesty's, and, despite a somewhat dragging performance, was received with unbounded applause. Everyone agreed that it had not "aged" at all. But what was the reason? Because it never was young. It never, so to speak, took us in, and therefore there was nothing in it to be found out. Some plays have a certain initial speciousness, a sort of bloom of youth, and look haggard when that has worn off. But this was not the case with "A Woman of No Importance."

It is the sentimental undisciplined otherwise. It is not, in fact, fifteen years old. But it was a remains groundwork of only of the deplorable which attraction to understate a mere wit in practice—drawing to great ladies, Caroline Pontefract and Archdeacon Que. The play, it is Wilde's most of its diction, phrasing, it is modern dramas are almost whole admirable, of the leading s. Mr. Tree is of Lord Illingworth's easy insolence, not possibly be art, if not alto-stanton, is ex-estate Bishop plays in excellent firm-Nothing could his Jeffreys's per-It sparkled and city as her dinner-Kate Cutler filled the part of Lady easy to burlesque. impossible task of credible. She did but she made an itable endeavour. by almost be said possible, and make uthnot. Her per-ucture perfect in its arm. The subor-ill importance, but as good as Gerald Maurice was very worthy structural movable inner pro- will take some six Majesty's stage, and height. For draw-Woman of No Im- its invaluable. W. A.

DRAMA

AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

WHEN Mr. Beerbohm Tree left the Haymarket Theatre it seemed as though we lost one of our finest character-actors; or rather not lost but mislaid on the vast stage of His Majesty's. Neither Shakespeare nor scenery nor Mr. Stephen Phillips was any compensation. But now that the proscenium can be made smaller there seems some chance of our being able to enjoy drama and acting once more. Who knows that we may not even enjoy Shakespeare again? The revival of Oscar Wilde's Woman of No Importance with an unusually brilliant caste has thrown considerable light on the state of the drama and dramatic criticism, and on contemporary taste. It proves that Wilde was the only literary playwright since Sheridan whose dramas command any degree of popular attention, and that in artificial comedy he has never been replaced. Mr. Bernard Shaw and the literary group of Court dramatists have never been tested for long runs, at least in England, and of them Mr. St. John Hankin alone is a derivative of Oscar Wilde's. An insufficient acquaintance with Mr. Shaw's plays, or perhaps with Wilde's, induces some of the critics to suggest that Mr. Shaw belongs or belonged to the same school. Both were men of letters, both were Irish, and there the resemblance ceases. Wilde was never influenced by Ibsen; he was only interested: he never took the trouble to acquire what for England was the new technique. Some of the critics point out that constructively his plays were old-fashioned when they were produced. That is actually true and it is for this reason, perhaps that they have all the freshness and the old fashion of Congreve and Sheridan. Just as Mr. Samuel Pepys thought poorly of Hamlet when it was revived at the end of the seventeenth century, Wilde's plays do not appeal to some of the critics, especially if they happen to be playwrights themselves. With the exception of "Ernest," none of them ever had a "good press," and this is ascribed to the author making a character (in one of his stories), say "that all the dramatic critics were to be bought, but to judge by their appearance they could not be very expensive." The number of times

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Times.

May 23.

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and simple duchess (we use the word "simple" a brain with about two convolutions) tries to the truth not the brain-a little. The story obviously, work up to the coming tragedy. knows no more of it up to a certain point t people acting. Then the audience is allowe coming. To the actors it is as sudden as it It is told very simply and naturally. This bo but what there is of it is true, direct, and si dialogue is easy and light; all melodrama an are avoided and the pathos is not cheap. T types of one class are well if slightly drawn.

A Just Fate. By GEORGE LONG. (Greening, 6s.)

HAROLD MARKS, whose just fate appears to be of this book, was a very wicked young man preserved from death the beautiful daug Richard Brandon, aspired to her heart and ha however, was of lowly birth, and Sir Richard, his daughter, declined with thanks. Sir I determined; so was Harold, who swore beautiful Helen, and to have and to hold h money-until death should them part. H Helen to elope with him, but Helen had assu that she was "all obedience," and so Harold While unsuccessful with Helen, Harold had b successful with a serving-maid, and while h Helen he stirred emotions in another lady's clasped her to his own. In the interva diamonds, pearls, rubies, deeds to estates. tricked Helen into a marriage which was per pawnbroker's apprentice, and after a short t disregarding the claims of paternity, and Elise, the third love. In the end he was justice, and Elise's brother-Harold's co crime-shot himself and Elise, and Helen ma Stradbroke, and Sir Richard married Ade married Arthur, and in a short space of tir "got two children" and Helen had got one, had "got a good husband at last"-which v for Helen. We may mention that there is the cover of "A Just Fate" which appears designed for another book: it seems to hav tion with the story.

first the cheer was interpreted as an... the police to take down the Royal Stan... occasions prominent citizens have been re... being rightly enforced in Edinburgh, and... regulations or rather the revised regula...

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Lord Illingworth ... Mr. TREE Sir John Pontefract ... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE Lord Alfred Rufford ... Mr. LANGHORNE BURTON Mr. Kelvil, M.P. ... Mr. CHARLES ALLAN The Ven. James Daubeny, D.D. (Rector of Wrookley) ... Mr. EDMUND MAURICE Gerald Arbuthnot ... Mr. CHARLES QUARTERMAINE Farquhar (Butler) ... Mr. CLIVE CURRIE Francis (Footman) ... Mr. F. COWLEY WRIGHT Lady Hunstanton ... Mrs. CHARLES CALVERT Lady Caroline Pontefract ... Miss KATE BISHOP Lady Stutfield ... Miss KATE CUTLER Mrs. Allenby ... Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS Hester Worsley ... Miss VIOLA TREE Alice (Maid) ... Miss HILDA MOORE Mrs. Arbuthnot ... Miss MARION TERRY Act I.-Lawn at Hunstanton. Act II. and III.-Room at Hunstanton. Act IV.-Room at Mrs. Arbuthnot's.

A crowded and brilliant audience last night extended a warm welcome to Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of No Importance." In the fourteen years which have elapsed since the production at the Haymarket, many things have changed, Mr. Harold Hodge, is editor of our est temporary, the Saturday Review.

The Tribune, whose literary page is one of conducted among the daily papers, has blunde A recent issue contains a poem entitled "A Illusion":

I thank you for the flowers you sent, she said, And then she pouted, blushed, and drooped her head; Forgive me for the words I spoke last night; The flowers have sweetly proved that you are right.

Then I forgave her, took her hand in mine, Sealed her forgiveness with the old, old sign; And as we wandered through the dim-lit bowers, I wondered who had really sent the flowers;

which is quoted from and attributed to the Tribune. The author is Geoffrey Clark, and which appeared originally in Kottabos, the magazine, was reprinted in "Echoes from Kottabos" quoted in our review of the book in the A February 2. America borrowed it, and the borrows from America!

We regret to record the death of Sir Benjamin the age of sixty-six; it occurred suddenly at P on May 10. The name of the great engineer throughout the world, if only in connection Assuan Dam. It is remarkable that his des synchronise so nearly with the termination Cromer's connection with Egypt, with whose a tion his great work was associated. The mora draw an analogy between their labours and s to which is most likely to remain longest inta recognising the great service rendered by Sir Wil cocks, it is fair to say that Sir Benjamin Baker und responsibility of the dam in the first place, and forcements and additions to it have been fina upon by his advice as consulting engineer. enable the storage of water to be practically do this country Sir Benjamin's fame is scarce account of his other great work, the Forth Bridg he acknowledged, with his accustomed gene assistance which he had received both in the e in the construction from his partner, the lat Fowler, the inception of the bridge in its presen due to him. Recently it will be remembere undertook the considerable risk of personall the structure of the roof of Charing Cross Sta its disastrous subsidence. His services were alw

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Few experiences there are more curious than that of witnessing, after a lapse of many years, the revival of a play which has served, in however small or large a degree, to make theatrical history. On such occasions there must always be a mental effort to reconstitute the original scene, an attempt to throw oneself back into the atmosphere and to re-create the feelings of other days. At the same time, it is impossible to resist the appeal of the present moment.

"What a happy phrase, what a brilliant paradox was that!" the spectator will say under his breath, only an instant later to find himself in the act of deliberating whether, after all, the phrase was quite so happy, the paradox quite so brilliant, as he originally imagined. Times change and we with them; there is no denying the truth of the Latin adage. On the other hand, how stimulating, how refreshing, it is to discover that the pleasure which a play, a novel or a picture once afforded us is as strong, as vital, and as sure as ever. Something of all this the expectant audience which last night awaited the rising of the curtain on "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's must have felt. Would the piece be found to have fulfilled the promise of its youth, would it prove to have matured merely, or to have aged all too soon? Save by the juvenile player the question was one not lightly to be set aside. For in the hierarchy of dramatic literature the author, Oscar Wilde, holds a prominent place, although, perhaps, more by virtue of what there was every reason to hope he would achieve than of what he actually accomplished. Rarely has a playwright possessed so amazing a gift for the utterance of brilliant epigrams; superficial as these often were, there lay in many cases beneath the veneer of reckless irresponsibility a substratum of solid truth. Had these, in addition, any substantial claim to an enduring value, or were they simply the ephemeral creations of an elish and all too ready imagination? Last night's revival, it must be confessed, leaves the question pretty much where it was. To-day, were "A Woman of no Importance" performed for the first time, the criticisms passed upon it would probably be as nearly as possible identical with those originally written respecting it. One can hardly say that the piece has aged, for its paradoxes are just as true or as false as they formerly were; its story, when at last it is permitted to rise to the surface, as humanly feasible. The play, for all its brilliancy, is in no sense a masterpiece; the author's cynicism grates upon the feelings, his verbal pyrotechnics, hugely appreciated at first, tend in the end to produce a feeling of fatigue, weight of repulsion, while the loose and disconnected manner in which he handles his theme is manifestly inimical to anything like complete success. This notwithstanding, there is a fascination about the piece not to be gained to the dialogue one listens, momentarily spell-bound at any rate, while the action is followed with an interest that seldom relaxes when once the wheels have been fairly set in motion.

Last night, the clever, well-remembered phrases fell on delighted ears. How easily one recalls them! "The Book of Life began in a garden-and ended in Revelations." "I look upon my husband as a promissory note which I am tired of meeting." "Woman resembles the Sphinx without a riddle," not "without a secret," as the speaker mistakenly said. "He talks, but has no conversation." "Extravagance is the luxury of the poor." "A man can survive anything but death." Few of these obiter dicta are proof against analysis, but it is pleasant and easy to give oneself over to the unalloyed satisfaction of listening to them. The trick of coining such phrases is, it has been contended, not difficult to master, but how many playwrights have, since Oscar Wilde ceased to practise it, been able to amuse us in the same way? Who, indeed, would dare to-day to set the characters of a play in a semi-circle and for full seven-eighths of an entire act keep them in their seats, uttering the words placed in their mouths by the witty author, while the plot was allowed to cool its heels in the wings? The strange thing in connection with "A Woman of No Importance" is that its evanescent qualities seem to be of a more enduring character than its permanent, or what should be its permanent, properties. If anything about it has grown old it is the story, which, however, was never of a strikingly novel description. Yet, here and there, it grips with undoubted and relentless force. The unexpected meeting of Lord Illingworth with the woman he, as a youth, had betrayed and heartlessly abandoned, the marvellously pathetic interview between mother and son, culminating in the confession by Mrs. Arbuthnot that the lad's would-be benefactor is the father to whom he owes the disgrace attached to his birth, the powerful scene in the last act, where Illingworth's cynical offer to make tardy reparation to the woman he once wronged receives a fitting response in the shape of a blow on his face-all these are incidents conceived in a genuinely dramatic spirit. Treated also they are in a masterly manner, and with a sense of their emotional value which cannot be over-praised. Here the author lays aside his cap and bells, and appears in the higher capacity of unsparring moralist, determined to enforce the due significance and true meaning of his theme. Such moments are well worth waiting for; they reveal the presence of the dramatist capable of playing with startling effect upon the profoundest and finest feelings of his audience.

The revival is distinguished by acting of a very remarkable quality. As Mrs. Arbuthnot, Miss Marion Terry gives a performance upon which memory will long linger as one of the most exquisite and tenderly pathetic that the London stage has witnessed for many a day. The portrait is altogether beautiful, and full of the most delicate touches. In the scene, already referred to, between Gerald and his mother Miss Terry moved her listeners to a quite unusual extent, and left them penetrated with a convincing sense of her highly-finished art. From Mr. Charles Quartermaine, as Gerald, she received superb support; in Mr. Quartermaine we have a young actor whose fresh and buoyant style is on a par with the frank earnestness and delightful ease of his manner. And how good it was to welcome back to the West-end stage an actress, so thorough in possession of her means, so cultured, and with so excellent a comedy method, polished yet resourceful, restrained yet brilliantly expressive, as Miss Ellis Jeffreys. Her Mrs. Allenby is beyond all praise Admirable, also, was Mrs. Charles Calvert's study of the garrulous and inconsequent Lady Caroline Pontefract; with what manifest zest the actress delivered the many good things committed to her charge! To the part of Lord Illingworth Mr. Tree once more returns. It would be no compliment to say that in it he was seen last night at his best for hesitancy served again and again to mar the effect of his performance. But it is a rôle eminently suited to his personality and his manner, and in a day or two it will doubtless rank as one of his best efforts. For the rest, a word of general commendation must suffice for the good service rendered by Mr. Fisher White, Mr. Charles Allan, Mr. Edmund Maurice, Miss Kate Bishop, and Miss Kate Cutler in smaller characters. That of Hester Worsley, the uncompromising American girl, presents unquestionable difficulties to the actress undertaking it, so wholly out of keeping with the rest of the picture is she Miss Viola Tree, nevertheless, displayed in it no small measure of sincerity and gentle force, although somewhat handicapped by an obvious feeling of self-consciousness. Called before the curtain on the conclusion of the play, Mr. Tree contented himself by expressing, in the briefest terms, his gratitude for the cordial welcome given to himself and his comrades.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Comedy in Four Acts by Oscar Wilde.

Lord Illingworth ... Mr. Tree. Sir John Pontefract ... Mr. J. Fisher White. Lord Alfred Rufford ... Mr. Langhorne Burton. Mr. Kelvil, M.P. ... Mr. Charles Allan. The Ven. James Daubeny, D.D. ... Mr. Edmund Maurice. Gerald Arbuthnot ... Mr. Charles Quartermaine. Lady Hunstanton ... Mrs. Charles Calvert. Lady Caroline Pontefract ... Miss Kate Bishop. Lady Stutfield ... Miss Kate Cutler. Mrs. Allenby ... Miss Ellis Jeffreys. Hester Worsley ... Miss Viola Tree. Mrs. Arbuthnot ... Miss Marion Terry.

"A Woman of No Importance," one of the chief successes of Mr. Tree's Haymarket management, was revived last night at His Majesty's, and, despite a somewhat dragging performance, was received with unbounded applause. Everyone agreed that it had not "aged" at all. But what was the reason? Because it never was young. It never, so to speak, took us in, and therefore there was nothing in it to be found out. Some plays have a certain initial speciousness, a sort of bloom of youth, and look haggard when that has worn off. But this was not the case with "A Woman of No Importance." The sentimental portion of it was from the first undisguisedly bad, and no one ever thought it otherwise. It was, as it were, born old-fashioned, insincere and starchy; and it remains, after fifteen years, neither more nor less so. But it was from the first easy, and it remains easy, to forget the very slight groundwork of sentimental plot, and to think only of the delightful embroidery of wit and paradox which was from the first the irresistible attraction of the play. This, indeed, is to understate the case. There is more than mere wit in the play-there is humorous character-drawing of a very high order. The two great ladies, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline Pontefract, are exquisite creations, and Archdeacon Daubeny is a delightful grotesque. The play, in short, contains some of Oscar Wilde's most brilliant work, and in the grace of its diction, the inimitable finish of its phrasing, it is nearer to Congreve than to any modern dramatist. Even the sentimental scenes are almost redeemed by their style.

The performance is on the whole admirable, or will be when two or three of the leading actors are firmer in their words. Mr. Tree is excellently suited in the part of Lord Illingworth. He plays it with an easy insolence, an airy grace, which could not possibly be bettered. Mrs. Charles Calvert, if not altogether plausible as Lady Hunstanton, is extremely amusing, and Miss Kate Bishop plays Lady Caroline Pontefract with excellent firmness and without exaggeration. Nothing could be more brilliant than Miss Ellis Jeffreys's performance of Mrs. Allenby. It sparkled and shimmered almost as dazzlingly as her dinner-gown of the second act. Miss Kate Cutler filled in cleverly the effective little part of Lady Stutfield, which it would be easy to burlesque. To Miss Viola Tree fell the impossible task of making the American heiress credible. She did not achieve the impossible, but she made an earnest and more than creditable endeavour. Of Miss Marion Terry it may almost be said that she did achieve the impossible, and make a human being of Mrs. Arbuthnot. Her performance was throughout quite perfect in its dignity, tenderness, and charm. The subordinate male parts are of small importance, but Mr. Charles Quartermaine was good as Gerald Arbuthnot, and Mr. Edmund Maurice was very amusing as the Archdeacon.

Mr. Tree has made a noteworthy structural innovation in the shape of a movable inner proscenium by which he can at will take some six feet off the breadth of His Majesty's stage, and proportionally diminish the height. For drawing-room plays, such as "A Woman of No Importance," this contrivance is invaluable.

W. A.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

By OSCAR WILDE.

[Revival.]

Lord Illingworth ...	Mr. TREE
Sir John Pontefract	Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Lord Alfred Rufford	Mr. LANGHORNE BURTON
Mr. Kelvil, M.P....	Mr. CHARLES ALLAN
The Ven. James Daubeny, D.D....	Mr. EDMUND MAURICE
Gerald Arbuthnot	Mr. CHARLES QUARTERMAINE
Lady Hunstanton...	Mrs. CHARLES CALVERT
Lady Caroline Pontefract ...	Miss KATE BISHOP
Lady Suttfield ...	Miss KATE CUTLER
Mrs. Allenby ...	Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS
Hester Worsley ...	Miss VIOLA TREE
Mrs. Arbuthnot ...	Miss MARION TERRY

may
23.

Times.

An interesting revival, and perhaps even of some importance. It will be important if it signifies that Mr. Tree is no longer to exclude modern comedy from the repertory of His Majesty's Theatre. The curious will have observed an alteration of the proscenium-frame last night, which brings the stage-picture within reasonable dimensions. Doubtless this means that Mr. Tree and his company intend from time to time to be seen in modern plays constructed to the scale of ordinary life; and if that be so, why so much the better, as Mr. Tree and his company ought not to be restricted to one or two kinds of drama, but to take, if they choose, all drama for their province. Everybody last night was obviously interested in the now unusual spectacle of Mr. Tree in a modern play and, so to speak, in his own every-day clothes. A modern play? Well, the word "modern" is elastic enough to cover *A Woman of No Importance*, which certainly cannot be called "ancient." Of course it dates; if only because it so obviously belongs to a period upon which its author set his mark and which was not quite like any other period before or since. A word constantly repeated in the course of the play is "nowadays"—a word that always has a curiously ironic ring a few years later. "Nowadays," says this or that character, people do or don't do—whatever it may be. Nowadays people don't talk in plays as Oscar Wilde made them talk—for one reason because there is no playwright among us capable of inventing that brilliant talk, and, for another, because playgoers would not be disposed to listen to it with enthusiasm. The truth is, a little of it goes a long way, and in *A Woman of No Importance* there is far too much of it. The first act, for instance, is all epigram, and there is not a hint of the play to come until the final sentence. It would be interesting—on some other occasion—to trace the filiation of Oscar Wilde's dialogue. Obviously it owes something to the Disraelian novel. Less obviously, but still unmistakably, something to Thomas Love Peacock (for example, the passage in Act III. wherein each character tries to define "the secret of life" will be recognized, as *in form*, an old friend by all readers of "Crotchet Castle"). But the greater part, though not always the best part, is of the author's own invention—including such really good things as "Women are Sphinxes without secrets," and such deplorably mechanical things as "Nothing succeeds like excess." Whatever the origin of this dialogue, and whatever its merits and demerits, one thing is certain—it ought to come trippingly off the tongue. Mr. Tree and his company spoke it last night a little too consciously—had, in fact, a "difficult labour" with their epigrams. This, however, is a shortcoming which will probably disappear in a couple of performances.

To the gist of the play, the story of Mrs. Arbuthnot and Lord Illingworth and their boy, ample justice was done. It strikes one perhaps "nowadays," as the author would say, to be a rather sentimentally treated story—the sentiment has reminiscences of the theatre of Augier and Dumas *filis*, which was inordinately fond of this particular theme—and the sentiment, moreover, rather jars with the cynicism of the other, or purely conversational, elements of the play. It is as though the author were continually shifting his point of view; holding a candle to the devil in his lighter passages and then atoning for that freak by a certain exaggeration of sentiment in the serious part of his story. The effect is a *pot-pourri* of moods, with an effect which is a little disconcerting. But the great point is that it is always an exhilarating effect. The play is never dull, and is often really brilliant. It is capitally acted. Miss Marion Terry gets a chance of pouring out all her sweetness, Mr. Tree is bright and incisive, Miss Tree a charmingly sincere *ingénue*, and Mrs. Calvert a richly comic dowager. The audience seemed thoroughly pleased with the whole entertainment.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

REVIVAL OF "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

By OSCAR WILDE.

Lord Illingworth	Mr. Tree.
Sir John Pontefract ...	Mr. J. Fisher White.
Lord Alfred Rufford ...	Mr. Langhorne Burton.
Mr. Kelvil, M.P.	Mr. Charles Allan.
The Ven. James Daubeny, D.D.	Mr. Edmund Maurice.
Gerald Arbuthnot	Mr. Charles Quartermaine.
Farquhar	Mr. Clive Currie.
Francis	Mr. F. Cowley Wright.
Lady Hunstanton	Mrs. Charles Calvert.
Lady Caroline Pontefract	Miss Kate Bishop.
Lady Stutfield	Miss Kate Cutler.
Mrs. Allenby	Miss Ellis Jeffreys.
Hester Worsley	Miss Viola Tree.
Alice	Miss Hilda Moore.
Mrs. Arbuthnot	Miss Marion Terry.

The irony of events has decreed that it is not the drama of Oscar Wilde's comedy which has aged since first we saw it years ago at the Haymarket Theatre, but the epigrammatic dialogue which in those days we thought marked the last cry in the art of the playwright. It was the artificiality of the brilliant talk which "dated" "A Woman of No Importance" on its revival at His Majesty's Theatre last night. The story, simple to a degree, gripped the attention and held the great audience enchained, because of its pathos, its humanity, and its drama—it was the "effective situation" which aroused the enthusiasm; and it was the clever but irrelevant witticisms—sparkled they never so brightly, causing a continual ripple of laughter through the evening as they did—which, nevertheless, were plainly felt to be holding back the plot and delaying the action. It is the drama, the plot, the action of Wilde's comedy which went home last night. The qualities of the theatre, not of the writer of epigrams, were the qualities which held and which were accountable for the enthusiasm which marked the revival of a play which at its birth was held to be first and foremost a comedy of dialogue. It is along these lines that we have progressed—dialogue, nowadays, does not strain after effect, it must be natural, direct, and it must develop the story. No longer are we willing to watch the characters of a play seated around a room shooting off fireworks at each other, be those fireworks as stimulating, as clever, and as pungent as those of Wilde. Of course, there is no Wilde now to write them—but, had he lived, it is almost certain that a dramatist with his force and his superb simplicity in action—a curious contrast to his extravagance and effort in language—would have subordinated the quality which first made him foremost to the quality he affected to despise—the power of telling a human story dramatically.

The plot of "A Woman of No Importance" could be told in an hour upon the stage if the extraneous conversation were cut out. The woman wronged, the profligate father, the meeting after many years, the struggle between mother and father for the child. Even in so short a space could the author have drawn for us no less admirably than he has done the characters of the decadent Lord Illingworth, cynic and loose liver, casuist and egotist, who meets years after the woman he wronged, the lovely woman, beautifully conceived, Mrs. Arbuthnot. Illingworth has already met his son, and, not knowing him, been drawn to him, and offered him the post of private secretary. Joyfully the boy accepts, and when, his mother and father having met, she asks her son to give up the bright dreams which have come to him, he temporarily is estranged from her, and the triumph seems again to be the man's. Illingworth, still utterly and entirely selfish, and, knowing now the truth, presses his advantage, and is ready to do this further evil thing to her—to take from her her son. It is only when Illingworth, to win a wager, insults the Puritan American girl Gerald Arbuthnot lovee, that the boy's eyes are opened, and he casts the father off. The confession of the mother to her son of his parentage and all that led to it is only one among many exquisite pieces of natural writing—which alternate continually with the affected smartness of the lighter portions of the play. Too late Illingworth would make amends—still actuated by selfishness merely, still a cad, and still a brute, though he may hide it ever so carefully, and finds himself thrust out, useless, unnecessary, and scorned. It is, indeed, a simple tale, but, in its essentials, it is superbly told. Irritated as we are by the trivial, though sparkling, clevernesses of the dialogue of the scenes which do not matter, in those that do the author never falters and never errs. There are moments in this play of the most delightful sincerity and feeling. The character of the American girl, for all her preachiness, is fragrant, honest, and sweet, and the playwright has very cleverly contrasted her faith and her ideals with the base egotism of some and the callous and indifferent "smartness" of others of his characters.

The piece is finely interpreted at His Majesty's. Miss Marion Terry, despite a certain hesitation, proved once again that she is an incomparable artist in her own *genre*. The pathetic naturalness of her acting, its gentle simplicity and quiet scorn, deservedly won for the actress the chief triumph of the evening. Mr. Tree, also a little uncertain of his lines, played with an admirable sense of character the part of Illingworth. Every phase of the man was shown us—his graceful airiness, his brutality, his coarseness, and his superficial refinement, the almost animal affection and fierce desire for his son. Mr. Tree presents a finished picture. Miss Viola Tree acted with much charm as Hester Worsley, the American girl; the sympathetic quality of her voice and her unaffected manner were very winsome. Miss Ellis Jeffreys sparkled through the piece as a typical "smart" woman, who has so many clever things to say, and says them in the grand "style." Mrs. Charles Calvert, as Lady Hunstanton, gives us another of those delightful old women which never cease to amuse, from their verbal crispness and their sluggish intelligence. Mr. Charles Quartermaine, as Gerald, acted sincerely; and Miss Kate Cutler, as Lady Stutfield, could not have been more inanelly natural.

Morning Post,

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Lord Illingworth	Mr. TREE.
Sir John Pontefract.....	Mr. J. FISHER WHITE.
Lord Alfred Rufford ...	Mr. LANGHORNE BURTON.
Mr. Kelvil, M.P.	Mr. CHARLES ALLAN.
The Ven. James Daubeney, D.D. (Rector of Wrockley)	Mr. EDMUND MAURICE.
Gerald Arbuthnot.....	Mr. CHARLES QUARTERMAINE.
Farquhar (Butler).....	Mr. CLIVE CURRIE.
Francis (Footman)	Mr. F. COWLEY WRIGHT.
Lady Hunstanton	Mrs. CHARLES CALVERT.
Lady Caroline Pontefract	Miss KATE BISHOP.
Lady Stutfield	Miss KATE CUTLER.
Mrs. Allenby	Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS.
Hester Worsley.....	Miss VIOLA TREE.
Alice (Maid)	Miss HILDA MOORE.
Mrs. Arbuthnot.....	Miss MARION TERRY.

Act I.—Lawn at Hunstanton.

Acts II. and III.—Room at Hunstanton.

Act IV.—Room at Mrs. Arbuthnot's.

A crowded and brilliant audience last night extended a warm welcome to Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of No Importance." In the fourteen years which have elapsed since the production at the Haymarket many things have happened. Not the least important is the rise of Mr. Bernard Shaw, who, while delighting no less than his countryman in perversity, has taught audiences to expect more to be done for them. Not all the epigrams heard last night are of the best, and some which required the mind to meet them half-way did not go so well as in the old days, when such things were the staple of conversation and everybody was on the look-out for them. Mr. Shaw is at pains to drive his points home. Of the two playwrights he hits the harder, but most of his hits are straight in front of him, and he has not the variety of strokes or the delicate and subtle wrist-play of his rival. Some of the quiet "glances" of last night passed unheeded. Yet on the whole the dialogue—and two-thirds of the play is dialogue but remotely connected with the little action there is—told well, and for the first two acts at least, where the writing is most leisurely, the audience laughed most heartily. The most dramatic act—the third, in which Gerald Arbuthnot is only deterred from striking Lord Illingworth for kissing the puritanic American girl by his mother's telling him that Illingworth is his father—gripped the attention of the audience, and at its finish the curtain had to be raised and lowered many times. Mr. Tree has put the piece on very handsomely, the garden scene being most beautiful, while the drawing-room scene, in which pass the second and third acts, is a model of quiet and tasteful luxury. Mr. Tree has not been as successful as usual in engaging members of the original cast. He repeats, of course, his admirable impersonation of Illingworth, calm, imperturbable, and suavely insolent, and gives the utmost point to the audacious sallies in which Illingworth specialises. His cool, assured and graceful, almost fascinating demeanour is wonderfully maintained. The only other member of the original cast is Mr. Charles Allan, who reappears as the pompous, platitudinous politician Kelvil. Miss Marion Terry in Mrs. Bernard Beere's old part, Mrs. Arbuthnot, acts with unfailing charm, tenderness and sympathy. Her sorrow and her passion are alike dignified. Mr. Charles Quartermaine is frank, bright, and pleasing as the son, and as Hester Worsley Miss Viola Tree sings extremely well. She acts, too, with sincerity, but both the nationality and the character of the American girl seem to elude her grasp. Mrs. Charles Calvert causes much amusement as the fatuous old Lady Hunstanton. Miss Ellis Jeffreys is delightfully buoyant and piquant as Mrs. Allenby, and Miss Kate Bishop as Lady Caroline and Miss Kate Cutler as Lady Stutfield materially contribute to the evening's success. A very clever performance is given by Mr. Edmund Maurice as the Rector; it was hugely enjoyed, but suffers somewhat from being too farcical for the tone of the play. "A Woman of No Importance" will be repeated nightly until further notice, and on Thursday next Mr. Tree will give a matinée of "Hamlet," in which he will be supported by Miss Viola Tree as Ophelia and Mrs. Russ Whytal as the Queen.

academy May 25

Dramatic critic will deal next week with the play of *A Woman of No Importance* at the Haymarket on Wednesday last. In the meanwhile we are on record that with the exception of the *Times Standard* nearly all the morning papers gave a false report of the evening. Whatever the opinions may be as to the play or the author, the fact remains that the critic was enthusiastic. We have heard of dramatic critics in the daily papers who leave after the first act and return to Fleet Street. On Wednesday one of them spent the whole time in the bar of the theatre writing his review after the first Act; he did not return to the auditorium until he left the theatre in the middle of the fourth Act.

There were many people who remembered the first performance of the play at the Haymarket on April 19, 1893, and perhaps a few of them regretted that the author was not present to witness the brilliant performance of Miss Viola Tree as Hester Worsley. It is a most difficult part. Miss Tree realised to a supreme degree the value of the lines she had to say, and Miss Marion Terry, of course, born for the "purple patches" of Wilde's plays. Every one knew Miss Terry would be perfect. I do not know that Miss Viola Tree was the ideal incarnation of Hester.

I have on former occasions made observations on the incompetence of the dramatic critics. But even the incompetent are entitled to their opinion, based though it may be on a deficient education. When, however, the critic, always an adept at *suppressio veri*, falls on *suggestio falsi*, the actor-manager, if no one else, is entitled to interfere. Any one present at His Majesty's Theatre on Wednesday night must have rubbed his eyes when he happened to see the *Daily Mail* on the following morning. The account of the evening given by "K. H." is a deliberate misrepresentation of facts: it is about as truthful as the *Daily Mail's* account of, say, the Colonial Exhibition. The curtain was raised four times after the first Act, and twice after each preceding Act. Mr. Glyn was called upon for a speech and each of the actors individually, repeatedly called before the footlights. The recently formed "Society of Dramatic Critics" would inquire into the conduct of "K. H.:" if by chance he is a member of that body. That a fifth-rate playwright like the author of vulgar suburban stories should be a dramatic critic at all is only another of the amazing features of the *Daily Mail* and Northcliffe's amazing organ.

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1907 DRAMA

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AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

WHEN Mr. Beerbohm Tree left the Haymarket Theatre it seemed as though we lost one of our finest character-actors; or rather not lost but mislaid on the vast stage of His Majesty's. Neither Shakespeare nor scenery nor Mr. Stephen Phillips was any compensation. But now that the proscenium can be made smaller there seems some chance of our being able to enjoy drama and acting once more. Who knows that we may not even enjoy Shakespeare again? The revival of Oscar Wilde's *Woman of No Importance* with an unusually brilliant cast has thrown considerable light on the state of the drama and dramatic criticism, and on contemporary taste. It proves that Wilde was the only literary playwright since Sheridan whose dramas command any degree of popular attention, and that in artificial comedy he has never been replaced. Mr. Bernard Shaw and the literary group of Court dramatists have never been tested for long runs, at least in England, and of them Mr. St. John Hankin alone is a derivative of Oscar Wilde's. An insufficient acquaintance with Mr. Shaw's plays, or perhaps with Wilde's, induces some of the critics to suggest that Mr. Shaw belongs or belonged to the same school. Both were men of letters, both were Irish, and there the resemblance ceases. Wilde was never influenced by Ibsen; he was only interested: he never took the trouble to acquire what for England was the new technique. Some of the critics point out that constructively his plays were old-fashioned when they were produced. That is actually true and it is for this reason perhaps that they have all the freshness and the old fashion of Congreve and Sheridan. Just as Mr. Samuel Pepys thought poorly of *Hamlet* when it was revived at the end of the seventeenth century, Wilde's plays do not appeal to some of the critics, especially if they happen to be playwrights themselves. With the exception of "Ernest," none of them ever had a "good press," and this is ascribed to the author making a character (in one of his stories), say "that all (the dramatic critics were to be bought, but to judge by their appearance they could not be very expensive." The number of times

and simple duchess (we use the word "simple" a brain with about two convolutions) tries to the truth not the brain—a little. The story obviously, work up to the coming tragedy. knows no more of it up to a certain point than people acting. Then the audience is allowed coming. To the actors it is as sudden as it is. It is told very simply and naturally. This too but what there is of it is true, direct, and simple dialogue is easy and light; all melodrama and are avoided and the pathos is not cheap. The types of one class are well if slightly drawn.

A Just Fate. By GEORGE LONG. (Greening, 6s.)

HAROLD MARKS, whose just fate appears to be of this book, was a very wicked young man, preserved from death the beautiful daughter Richard Brandon, aspired to her heart and had however, was of lowly birth, and Sir Richard, his daughter, declined with thanks. Sir I determined; so was Harold, who swore beautiful Helen, and to have and to hold her money—until death should them part. Helen Helen to elope with him, but Helen had assured that she was "all obedience," and so Harold. While unsuccessful with Helen, Harold had been successful with a serving-maid, and while Helen he stirred emotions in another lady's clasp her to his own. In the interval diamonds, pearls, rubies, deeds to estates. tricked Helen into a marriage which was per pawnbroker's apprentice, and after a short time disregarding the claims of paternity, and Elise, the third love. In the end he was justice, and Elise's brother—Harold's crime—shot himself and Elise, and Helen married Stradbroke, and Sir Richard married Ada married Arthur, and in a short space of time "got two children" and Helen had got one. had "got a good husband at last"—which was for Helen. We may mention that which is the cover of "A Just Fate" which appears designed for another book: it seems to have a connection with the story.

sons, Mr. Harold Hodge, is editor of our esteemed temporary, the *Saturday Review*.

The *Tribune*, whose literary page is one of conducted among the daily papers, has blundered. A recent issue contains a poem entitled "An Illusion":

I thank you for the flowers you sent, she said,
And then she pouted, blushed, and drooped her head;
Forgive me for the words I spoke last night;
The flowers have sweetly proved that you are right.

Then I forgave her, took her hand in mine,
Sealed her forgiveness with the old, old sign;
And as we wandered through the dim-lit bowers,
I wondered who had really sent the flowers;

which is quoted from and attributed to the *Tribune*. The author is Geoffrey Clark, and which appeared originally in *Kottabos*, the magazine, was reprinted in "Echoes from Kottabos" quoted in our review of the book in the *AC* February 2. America borrowed it, and the borrows from America!

We regret to record the death of Sir Benjamin the age of sixty-six; it occurred suddenly at Perth on May 19. The name of the great engineer throughout the world, if only in connection Assuan Dam. It is remarkable that his death synchronise so nearly with the termination Cromer's connection with Egypt, with whose a tion his great work was associated. The moral draw an analogy between their labours and spirit to which is most likely to remain longest intact recognising the great service rendered by Sir Wilcocks, it is fair to say that Sir Benjamin Baker and responsibility of the dam in the first place, and forcements and additions to it have been finally upon by his advice as consulting engineer. enable the storage of water to be practically done this country Sir Benjamin's fame is scarcely account of his other great work, the Forth Bridge he acknowledged, with his accustomed generous assistance which he had received both in the construction from his partner, the late Fowler, the inception of the bridge in its present due to him. Recently it will be remembered undertook the considerable risk of personally the structure of the roof of Charing Cross Station its disastrous subsidence. His services were always

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Few experiences there are more curious than that of witnessing, after a lapse of many years, the revival of a play which has served, in howsoever small or large a degree, to make theatrical history. On such occasions there must always be a mental effort to reconstitute the original scene, an attempt to throw oneself back into the atmosphere and to re-create the feelings of other days. At the same time, it is impossible to resist the appeal of the present moment. "What a happy phrase, what a brilliant paradox was that!" the spectator will say under his breath, only an instant later to find himself in the act of deliberating whether, after all, the phrase was quite so happy, the paradox quite so brilliant, as he originally imagined. Times change and we with them; there is no denying the truth of the Latin adage. On the other hand, how stimulating, how refreshing, it is to discover that the pleasure which a play, a novel or a picture once afforded us is as strong, as vital, and as sure as ever. Something of all this the expectant audience which last night awaited the rising of the curtain on "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's must have felt. Would the piece be found to have fulfilled the promise of its youth, would it prove to have matured merely, or to have aged all too soon? Save by the juvenile playgoer the question was one not lightly to be set aside. For in the hierarchy of dramatic literature the author, Oscar Wilde, holds a prominent place, although, perhaps, more by virtue of what there was every reason to hope he would achieve than of what he actually accomplished. Rarely has a playwright possessed so amazing a gift for the utterance of brilliant epigrams; superficial as these often were, there lay in many cases beneath the veneer of reckless irresponsibility a substratum of solid truth. Had these, in addition, any substantial claim to an enduring value, or were they simply the ephemeral creations of an elfish and all too ready imagination? Last night's revival, it must be confessed, leaves the question pretty much where it was. To-day, were "A Woman of No Importance" performed for the first time, the criticisms passed upon it would probably be as nearly as possible identical with those originally written respecting it. One can hardly say that the piece has aged, for its paradoxes are just as true or as false as they formerly were; its story, when at last it is permitted to rise to the surface, as humanly feasible. The play, for all its brilliancy, is in no sense a masterpiece; the author's cynicism grates upon the feelings, his verbal pyrotechnics, hugely appreciated at first, tend in the end to produce a feeling of fatigue, wellnigh of repulsion, while the loose and disconnected manner in which he handles his theme is manifestly inimical to anything like complete success. This notwithstanding, there is a fascination about the piece not to be gained; to the dialogue one listens, momentarily spell-bound at any rate, while the action is followed with an interest that seldom relaxes when once the wheels have been fairly set in motion.

Last night, the clever, well-remembered phrases fell on delighted ears. How easily one recalls them! "The Book of Life began in a garden—and ended in Revelations." "I look upon my husband as a promissory note which I am tired of meeting." "Woman resembles the Sphinx without a riddle," not "without a secret," as the speaker mistakenly said. "He talks, but has no conversation." "Extravagance is the luxury of the poor." "A man can survive anything but death." Few of these obiter dicta are proof against analysis, but it is pleasant and easy to give oneself over to the unalloyed satisfaction of listening to them. The trick of coining such phrases is, it has been contended, not difficult to master, but how many playwrights have, since Oscar Wilde, succeeded in producing a play able to amuse us in the same way? Who, indeed,

would dare to-day to set the characters of a play in a semi-circle and for full seven-eighths of an entire act keep them in their seats, uttering the words placed in their mouths by the witty author, while the plot was allowed to cool its heels in the wings? The strange thing in connection with "A Woman of No Importance" is that its evanescent qualities seem to be of a more enduring character than its permanent, or what should be its permanent, properties. If anything about it has grown old it is the story, which, however, was never of a strikingly novel description. Yet, here and there, it grips with undoubted and relentless force. The unexpected meeting of Lord Illingworth with the woman he, as a youth, had betrayed and heartlessly abandoned, the marvellously pathetic interview between mother and son, culminating in the confession by Mrs. Arbuthnot that the lad's would-be benefactor is the father to whom he owes the disgrace attached to his birth, the powerful scene in the last act, where Illingworth's cynical offer to make tardy reparation to the woman he once wronged receives a fitting response in the shape of a blow on his face—all these are incidents conceived in a genuinely dramatic spirit. Treated also they are in a masterly manner, and with a sense of their emotional value which cannot be over-praised. Here the author lays aside his cap and bells, and appears in the higher capacity of unsparring moralist, determined to enforce the due significance and true meaning of his theme. Such moments are well worth waiting for; they reveal the presence of the dramatist capable of playing with startling effect upon the profoundest and finest feelings of his audience.

The revival is distinguished by acting of a very remarkable quality. As Mrs. Arbuthnot, Miss Marion Terry gives a performance upon which memory will long linger as one of the most exquisite and tenderly pathetic that the London stage has witnessed for many a day. The portrait is altogether beautiful, and full of the most delicate touches. In the scene, already referred to, between Gerald and his mother Miss Terry moved her listeners to a quite unusual extent, and left them penetrated with a convincing sense of her highly-finished art. From Mr. Charles Quatermaine, as Gerald, she received superb support; in Mr. Quatermaine we have a young actor whose fresh and buoyant style is on a par with the frank earnestness and delightful ease of his manner. And how good it was to welcome back to the West-end stage an actress, so thorough in possession of her means, so cultured, and with so excellent a comedy method, polished yet resourcefully restrained yet brilliantly expressive, as Miss Elli Jeffreys. Her Mrs. Allenby is beyond all praise Admirable, also, was Mrs. Charles Calvert's study of the garrulous and inconsequent Lady Carolin Pontefract; with what manifest zest the actress delivered the many good things committed to her charge! To the part of Lord Illingworth Mr. Tre once more returns. It would be no compliment to say that in it he was seen last night at his best for hesitancy served again and again to mar the effect of his performance. But it is a rôle eminently suited to his personality and his manner, and in a day or two it will doubtless rank as one of his best efforts. For the rest, a word of general commendation must suffice for the good service rendered by Mr. Fisher White, Mr. Charles Allan, Mr. Edmund Maurice, Miss Kate Bishop, and Miss Kate Cutler, in smaller characters. That of Hester Worsley, the uncompromising American girl, presents unquestionable difficulties to the actress undertaking it, so wholly out of keeping with the rest of the picture is she Miss Viola Tree, nevertheless, displayed in it no small measure of sincerity and gentle force, although somewhat handicapped by an obvious feeling of self-consciousness. Called before the curtain on the conclusion of the play, Mr. Tree contented himself by expressing, in the briefest terms, his gratitude for the cordial welcome given to himself and his comrades.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Comedy in Four Acts by Oscar Wilde.

Lord Illingworth	Mr. Tree.
Sir John Pontefract	Mr. J. Fisher White.
Lord Alfred Rufford	Mr. Langhorne Burton.
Mr. Kelvil, M.P.	Mr. Charles Allan.
The Ven. James Daubeny, D.D.	Mr. Edmund Maurice.
Gerald Arbuthnot	Mr. Charles Quartermaine.
Lady Hunstanton	Mrs. Charles Calvert.
Lady Caroline Pontefract	Miss Kate Bishop.
Lady Stutfield	Miss Kate Cutler.
Mrs. Allenby	Miss Ellis Jeffreys.
Hester Worsley	Miss Viola Tree.
Mrs. Arbuthnot	Miss Marion Terry.

"A Woman of No Importance," one of the chief successes of Mr. Tree's Haymarket management, was revived last night at His Majesty's, and, despite a somewhat dragging performance, was received with unbounded applause. Everyone agreed that it had not "aged" at all. But what was the reason? Because it never was young. It never, so to speak, took us in, and therefore there was nothing in it to be found out. Some plays have a certain initial speciousness, a sort of bloom of youth, and look haggard when that has worn off. But this was not the case with "A Woman of No Importance." The sentimental portion of it was from the first undisguisedly bad, and no one ever thought it otherwise. It was, as it were, born old-fashioned, insincere and stagey; and it remains, after fifteen years, neither more nor less so. But it was from the first easy, and it remains easy, to forget the very slight groundwork of sentimental plot, and to think only of the delightful embroidery of wit and paradox which was from the first the irresistible attraction of the play. This, indeed, is to understate the case. There is more than mere wit in the play—there is humorous character-drawing of a very high order. The two great ladies, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline Pontefract, are exquisite creations, and Archdeacon Daubeny is a delightful grotesque. The play, in short, contains some of Oscar Wilde's most brilliant work, and in the grace of its diction, the inimitable finish of its phrasing, it is nearer to Congreve than to any modern dramatist. Even the sentimental scenes are almost redeemed by their style.

The performance is on the whole admirable, or will be when two or three of the leading actors are firmer in their words. Mr. Tree is excellently suited in the part of Lord Illingworth. He plays it with an easy insolence, an airy grace, which could not possibly be bettered. Mrs. Charles Calvert, if not altogether plausible as Lady Hunstanton, is extremely amusing, and Miss Kate Bishop plays Lady Caroline Pontefract with excellent firmness and without exaggeration. Nothing could be more brilliant than Miss Ellis Jeffreys's performance of Mrs. Allenby. It sparkled and shimmered almost as dazzlingly as her dinner-gown of the second act. Miss Kate Cutler filled in cleverly the effective little part of Lady Stutfield, which it would be easy to burlesque. To Miss Viola Tree fell the impossible task of making the American heiress credible. She did not achieve the impossible, but she made an earnest and more than creditable endeavour. Of Miss Marion Terry it may almost be said that she did achieve the impossible, and make a human being of Mrs. Arbuthnot. Her performance was throughout quite perfect in its dignity, tenderness, and charm. The subordinate male parts are of small importance, but Mr. Charles Quartermaine was good as Gerald Arbuthnot, and Mr. Edmund Maurice was very amusing as the Archdeacon.

Mr. Tree has made a noteworthy structural innovation in the shape of a movable inner proscenium by which he can at will take some six feet off the breadth of His Majesty's stage, and proportionally diminish the height. For drawing-room plays, such as "A Woman of No Importance," this contrivance is invaluable.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE"

Revival at His Majesty's.

Oscar Wilde's play is now some fourteen years old, and the natural question is—How has it stood a revival? Yet that is not a question that really needs an answer, since it does not now fail to impress the mind because it wears a slightly tarnished air, and is of a mode a little passé, but because nowhere in it is any reality of feeling. It is the one play in which Oscar Wilde tried to be serious, to deal in some way with the great problems of life, and he only managed to show that they eluded his grasp.

The duel between Lord Illingworth and the woman he shamefully abandoned twenty years ago for the possession of their son is a theme which fashion cannot touch, if it be treated with real insight and real characterisation. But Oscar Wilde, never having cared for such subjects, had no experience of them, not even an imaginative experience. He had to fall back on melodrama of a crude morality. His Lord Illingworth, except for his attitude to life, is an inexplicable as any villain of old-fashioned melodrama. He has no heart, and, what is more unnatural, no genuine feelings whatever. Yet we are asked to believe that when suddenly brought face to face with a son he has forgotten, Lord Illingworth is seized with belated paternal longings. Even then he treats the matter in a cynical manner which is true enough to his character as first sketched, but quite untrue to his rôle as a father of potential affection. As to Mrs. Arbuthnot, she meanders through three acts in the conventional black dress of the injured heroine, thinking the thoughts that go with and are expressed by that conventional garb. Wilde had an opportunity of lifting his play from the rut into which a false idea of theatrical needs had stranded it, but he missed the opportunity. Mrs. Arbuthnot, on hearing that her son has been appointed private secretary to Illingworth, does her best to prevent what would have seemed to her the greatest tragedy of all. But sooner than tell that son, she allows matters to go their way until a melodramatic incident forces her hand. Illingworth is in danger of being struck by his son for having insulted a young girl with whom his son is in love. "Let me kill him," shouts Gerald. "No," exclaims the mother, "he is your father." The situation is made ludicrous by the fact that the son has no kind of chance of killing his father. It is just an effective curtain of Philistine melodrama, and quite upsets the whole idea of the play.

The epigrams which once seemed so wonderful to us are clever when they are not obviously machine-made, but Mr. Bernard Shaw has improved on his model. His Christy Minstrel epigrammatists, sitting in a circle, are more witty and more humorous than Oscar Wilde's.

The play was not as well acted as it will be when Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry know their lines. Mr. Tree carries off such a character as Illingworth with more ease and naturalness than ever he brings to Shakespeare, but he did not give me the impression last night of being inside the character such as it is. One must admit the difficult task of making such an impossible blackguard alive in the manner in which Wilde has drawn him. Miss Terry might have made more of a creation of her part, and have improved on the author, but she had not a firm grasp of it, and failed in conveying an intensity of hate. The performance as a whole was much too slow, and the only perfect acting was that of Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton, a genuine piece of comedy characterisation. The part itself is the best in the play, and was genuinely observed from life, I feel sure, but that does not detract from Mrs. Calvert's charming and subtle performance.

NOTABLE REVIVAL.

"Woman of No Importance"
at His Majesty's.

An evening strangely mingled of admiration and disillusionment, of living brilliance and tragic memory, was to be spent last night at His Majesty's over Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of No Importance." The revival was applauded by a crowded audience, ablaze with distinction—with the Duchess of Marlborough in a box, and celebrities of quite the first water content to bespangle the stalls.

As for the play itself—just as fourteen years ago at the old Haymarket—it still proves the most tantalising, provoking, not by any means the greatest of Oscar Wilde's amazing exploits. It was written before he had developed the pure fantastic appeal, entirely and inimitably his own, that came with "The Importance of being Earnest." As "Lady Windermere's Fan" had been but an embroidered conventional comedy, so "A Woman of No Importance" never was anything very much else but an embroidered melodrama.

And such a melodrama! Perhaps the utter worthlessness of the story as such emerges more than ever now, when we have no particular straw to thrash by way of "problem-plays." Need one recall how Lord Illingworth, the agreeable rake, appointed Gerald Arbuthnot his secretary, only to find that Gerald's mother was the girl he had wronged in the long ago, and that Gerald was in reality his son?

Need one recall how the supreme moment arrives when Mrs. Arbuthnot strikes her former lover across the face with her glove, and calls him, in indescribable accents of scorn, a "man of no importance." So far as all this kind of thing is concerned, the play might just as well have been produced at Hoxton as in the Haymarket, and "The Worst Woman in London" may claim eternal kinship with "A Woman of No Importance."

DELIGHTFUL DIALOGUE.

But over all this trash there remains still for our delight the touch of undying genius in that dialogue which has more genuine Irish grace in its wit than anything since Sheridan. It was quite wonderful last night, while the characters sat in the garden and then in the drawing-room and discussed everything in general, forgetting all about any question of the plot—it was quite wonderful with what freshness, naturalness, ease, simplicity, those old epigrams flowed out.

The only difference between fourteen years ago and now was perhaps that in between we have had another Irishman, who is nothing like so witty, but has something true to say—and his initials are "G. B. S." One felt this last night. Oscar Wilde's flippant talk about women seems curiously empty after Mr. Bernard Shaw has taken them seriously. After Mr. Shaw's logical and deadly earnest gospelling, too, one feels strangely unsatisfied with Oscar Wilde's alternating of palpably insincere melodramatic sentimentality with this cynicism that always dances on the brink of depravity.

For all that the evening sparkles still. "The House of Lords is never in touch with public opinion; that is what keeps it civilised." "Much may be done with a magic lantern or a missionary or some popular amusement of that sort." "Twenty years of romance makes a woman a ruin; after twenty years of married life she resembles a public building." "My husband is like a promissory note; I'm tired of meeting him." "Married men nowadays act like bachelors, and bachelors like married men." "Men are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and horribly conceited when they are bad." "Saints generally have a past, and sinners sometimes a future." "There are two kinds of women in society—plain and coloured." "The peerage is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done." These are just a few familiar reminders.

MR. TREE'S FINE ACTING.

As before, Mr. Tree makes an ideal Lord Illingworth. He manages to make him acceptable, even though Illingworth himself is almost as unsympathetic as the Marquis de Priola, whom he so curiously resembles. The epigrams, too, slipped from Mr. Tree's mouth with quite delightful naturalness. They did not startle him, as Oscar Wilde's dialogue is so apt to seem to do with people who speak it.

For the rest, Mr. Allan, as the opinionated M.P., remains the only original member of the cast. The late Miss Rose Leclercq, who used to conduct herself with such piquant dignity as Lady Hunstanton, is replaced by Mrs. Calvert, who plays the part in entirely different fashion, making her ladyship a dear, homely old thing. The epigrams arrive just as naively.

Then Miss Ellis Jeffreys replaces Mrs. Tree as Lady Alonby, the lady whose husband was never visible. Here, too, was another complete difference, Mrs. Tree's enigmatic reading of the character being converted by Miss Jeffreys into a frankly, splendidly brilliant personality. In a gown shimmering, and with a social art that few other actresses can command, Miss Ellis Jeffreys was wholly delightful, supremely distinguished.

Another change was Miss Viola Tree's appearance in Miss Julia Neilson's old part of the pure American girl who was supposed to put everyone to shame. Frankly, in spite of Miss Tree's graceful performance, the part never did ring quite

Above all, of course, there was the arrival of Miss Marion Terry in place of Mrs. Bernard Beere in the part of Mrs. Arbuthnot herself—the "woman of no importance." Never, of course, before has the part been played with such depth of sincerity and gentle grace and poignancy of pathos. With Miss Marion Terry as Mrs. Arbuthnot one recognises that if Oscar Wilde's spirit were alive, his silences were golden.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

If Oscar Wilde's reputation as a dramatist is to remain untarnished, then there must be an end to the revivals of his plays. If one may judge by the impression made by "A Woman of No Importance," his work has no enduring quality, inasmuch as it lacks the element of humanity and simply deals flippantly with the flippant side of life. When Oscar Wilde made his meteoric appearance in the theatrical world we accepted his inversion of stock phrases as something novel and entertaining. He was a lion, if not the lion of society at the time, and there was a certain hardihood in his method which dazzled as well as amused.

A rustic watching the three-card trick will stand in open-eyed amazement at the sleight-of-hand of the performer, but the rustic is not to be for ever tickled with such jugglery. So it is with Oscar Wilde's verbal trickery. When it was fresh and found us unprepared it passed for exceptional brilliancy, but now we have seen the artifice and recognised the artificiality of his style we no longer find the same joy in his smart sentences. As a matter of fact they become tiresome.

I do not see that there is the faintest hope for the management in the revival last night at His Majesty's Theatre of "A Woman of No Importance." The slight tissue of plot is overwhelmed by its embroidery. We take little or no interest in the lady who meets in middle life the father of her son. He refused to marry her in the time of her trouble, and she refuses to mate with him when circumstances throw them together, and the son has (neither knowing the relationship) accepted the position of private secretary to his own father. The situation is essentially theatrical, and its flimsiness is not redeemed by the author's manner of presenting it to the audience.

No dramatist can be considered truly great who does not make some approach to nature, who does not seize hold of some vital element of humanity, and who does not scorn the flotsam and jetsam which is so greedily pounced upon by the unimaginative author. Because Oscar Wilde utilised the material that floated so readily to hand, and painted it with the prevailing colour of the period, it does not entitle him to be classed among the superior writers for the stage. To cut short the argument and come to brutal fact, the impression made upon me by last night's representation was that Oscar Wilde is, from a dramatist's point of view, an overrated man, and that his plays are as dead as mutton.

And it really seemed as if those engaged in the performance thought the same, for the acting was spiritless and slow, and lacking in the one thing which might have galvanised into life the dry bones we were asked to accept as a living body. Mr. Tree could do no more than make of Lord Illingworth a passable walking gentleman. Miss Marion Terry did the most she could to secure sympathy for a character which has had its like in many a transpontine melodrama—Oscar Wilde had really no original creative gift. Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Miss Kate Cutler, Miss Viola Tree, Mrs. Charles Calvert (who stood out as the best actress of the evening), and others did what they could, but it was obvious they had little sympathy.

B. W. F.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE"

Oscar Wilde's Famous Play Revived by Mr. Tree at
His Majesty's Theatre.

Oscar Wilde would have given ten years of his life to see the reception given last night to "A Woman of No Importance," revived by Mr. Tree at His Majesty's Theatre.

With all his faults to spoil his memory, Oscar Wilde is still head and shoulders above modern playwrights in the arts of satire and epigram. His witticisms sparkled last night as they never did before.

A brilliant company, including Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry, interpreted his genius, and a brilliant audience, which included the Austrian Ambassador, Sir Oliver Lodge, Mr. Hall Caine, Miss Irene Vanbrugh, and Mr. W. S. Gilbert paid tribute to his power as a dramatist. At the close of the wonderful third act there were six or seven "calls," and at the end of the play the audience stood and applauded for ten minutes before facing the rain outside.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

DAMP SQUIBS AT HIS MAJESTY'S
THEATRE.

[BY SPECIAL WIRE.]

LONDON, Wednesday, May 22.

The English theatre has covered a good deal of ground since Oscar Wilde's epigrammatic fireworks blinded London in the early nineties. The revival of "A Woman of no Importance" at His Majesty's Theatre to-night was like a firework show on a damp evening. The rockets and squibs and crackers were all there—but they fizzled. The crowd was there, eager and willing to applaud and enjoy itself, but the applause had not the right ring.

Unfortunately, if you take away the fireworks, there is very little left to "A Woman of no Importance." The story itself is the merest melodrama—a combination of conventional situations and claptrap morality. Considered from one point of view, the cynicism of the "fake" sentiment is hideously repulsive.

One must admit, however reluctantly, that the piece suffered at the hands of the principal actor. Mr. Tree has rarely been so ill-cast or so uncertain of his lines.

The chief successes of the evening were scored by Mrs. Calvert, perfect in her technique, and exquisite in the simplicity of her style; Miss Ellis Jeffreys, as the silly, quasi-shocking Mrs. Allenby, and Miss Marion Terry, whose wonderful charm went far to make a possible person of the weak-headed, invertebrate Mrs. Alouthnot.

Daily Graphic.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

Last night Mr. Tree revived Oscar Wilde's "A Woman of No Importance," which he originally produced at the Haymarket Theatre some fourteen years ago. Mr. Tree himself is admirably suited with the part of the modern Lovelace, Lord Illingworth, and Miss Marion Terry is all that is charming, dignified, and womanly as the ill-used Mrs. Arbuthnot, while Mrs. Charles Calvert is delightfully possible as well as amusing as the kindly, if forgetful old dowager Lady Hunstanton. Miss Ellis Jeffreys is her smart and fascinating self as the intellectual flirt, Mrs. Allenby, and Miss Viola Tree looks the beautiful, high-minded young American girl to perfection. Moreover, Mr. Tree has gone to the trouble and expense of having a white and gold inner frame made to the marble proscenium in order to reduce the size of the stage pictures from spectacular-drama to comedy proportions, so that he has certainly done his utmost for the success of the piece. If this does not entirely fulfil his expectations it will be on account of the want of truth to life in the drawing of the principal characters, whose actions are not the result of deep feeling, but merely mechanical ingenuities necessary for the production of the situations. Even Miss Marion Terry cannot make one sympathise with Mrs. Arbuthnot when she talks of her "ruined, miserable existence" in her comfortable house beside the son she adores, and surrounded with admiring and exceedingly kind friends. It seems absolutely necessary to point out to her that she is much better off, and has been for twenty years, than any widow who mourns a loved companion, or any woman who is compelled to live with a bad husband. Of course, the play is only an excuse for smart dialogue, of which there is a great deal that is brilliant enough to pass for wit while it is being spoken in the theatre; but it lacks that depth of observation and truth which is the foundation of the wit which will bear repetition in the study. However, the piece as a whole and Mrs. Terry's performance found much favour with a large and fashionable audience, who applauded heartily at the final fall of the curtain.

7. 'A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.'

DAMP SQUIBS AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

The English theatre has covered a good deal of ground since Oscar Wilde's epigrammatic fireworks blinded London in the early nineties. An honest audience no longer waits, breathless, for the next paradox; no longer shakes with merriment over an inverted proverb; no longer nods its head in wise appreciation of some high-sounding platitude. Patient plodders in Wilde's footsteps have given away the trick, with the blessed result that the epigram, together with its first cousin, the pun, survives only in the scullery of dramatic literature. Such plays as "The Tyranny of Tears" and "The Silver Box" have taught us, at any rate, that one character truthfully drawn is worth a whole stageful of clever-clever dolls, just as a single real flower is infinitely more beautiful than the most lavish and ingenious pyrotechnic display on record.

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Wilde was amateurish, too, in his methods. His devices for dragging in his "smart sayings" were childish. "What is so-and-so?" asks somebody, and then we get the carefully concocted answer. Or, again, "Define morality, Lord Illingworth." Whereupon Lord Illingworth lets himself go, and the others sit round him and gape at his cleverness.

One must admit, however reluctantly, that the piece suffered at the hands of the principal actor. Mr. Tree has rarely been so ill-cast or so uncertain of his lines. Instead of the easy, polished, cynical, amusing, brilliant creature that poor Wilde intended to put upon the stage, one had a slow, halting, rather dull gentleman, whose every sentence, almost, began with a long "Oh" or "Ah," and who over-emphasised his witticisms in such a way as to render them insufferably priggish.

The chief successes of the evening were scored by Mrs. Charles Calvert, perfect in her technique, of course, and exquisite in the simplicity of her style; Miss Ellis Jeffreys, as the silly, quasi-shocking Mrs. Allenby; and Miss Marion Terry, whose wonderful charm went far to make a possible person of the weak-headed, invertebrate Mrs. Arbuthnot. Clever little character-studies also came from Mr. Edmund Maurice, Mr. Charles Allan, Mr. Fisher White, Mr. Langhorne Burton, Miss Kate Bishop, and Miss Kate Cutler. Mr. Charles Quartermaine's Gerald Arbuthnot was good, but would be even better if his attitudes, and gestures, and tones were less conventionally "boyish." Miss Viola Tree made but a little of the outspoken American girl.

SPORTING LIFE

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE," AT HIS MAJESTY'S.

Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance" was revived last night at His Majesty's Theatre. Although entirely artificial, the piece is almost unsurpassed for the brilliancy of its epigrammatical wit, and if the serious speeches are not at all the sort of thing real people would say, many of them are of true poetical conception. Miss Marion Terry played charmingly as Mrs Arbuthnot, and Mr Tree played cleverly as Lord Illingworth, but he will be more satisfactory when he has mastered all his lines. In the second act last night the prompter was heard almost as often as the actor. Miss Viola Tree played delightfully as Hester Worsley, Mrs Charles Calvert was rightly rendered as Mrs Calvert, and the other characters were all well rendered.

A large audience welcomed the revival with enthusiasm.

WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

EMP SQUIBS AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

The English theatre has covered a good deal of ground since Oscar Wilde's grammatical fireworks blinded London in the early nineties. An honest audience no longer waits, breathless, for the next paradox; no longer shakes with merriment over an inverted proverb; no longer nods its head in wise appreciation of some high-sounding platitude. Patient plodders in Wilde's footsteps have given away the trick, with the blessed result that the epigram, together with its first cousin, the pun, survives only in the scullery of dramatic literature. Such plays as "The Tyranny of Tears" and "The Silver Box" have taught us, at any rate, that one character truthfully drawn is worth a whole pageful of clever-clever dolls, just as a single real flower is infinitely more beautiful than the most lavish and ingenious pyrotechnic display on record.

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Seeing the play again in its revival at His Majesty's last night, we wonder at this expression of opinion. The Puritan maiden, Hester Worsley (Miss Viola Tree) does, indeed, express views about sexual equality in the matter of punishment for sexual sin that are quite in accord with much of what we hear to-day; but then we heard it long ago, and can scarcely account a play modern on so slight a ground.

In idea the play is essentially old-fashioned, and so is its technique. Most of the characters are given to firing off witticisms or what are intended for such; while the principal personage, he cannot be dubbed the hero, Lord Illingworth (Mr. Beerbohm Tree), simply elucides at every chance remark his interlocutor happens to make, and uses it as a peg upon which to hang epigrams. He is not merely frivolous, heartless, and wicked. That could be forgiven, although one feels that as the author did not intend him to be regarded as a villain, he really ought to have endowed him with some sympathetic quality; but he becomes a bore, and that is unforgivable. Many of the witticisms, such as that about the Book of Life commencing with a man and woman in a garden and ending with Revelations, are brilliant enough; some do more than skim the surface, but many are really not much elevated above the pun.

However, it is as a storehouse of verbal pyrotechnics that Oscar Wilde's play will probably be welcomed by the public. Certainly last night a continuous crackle of laughter accompanied the dialogue. As a story, it is weak; as a representation of human life, shallow and artificial. The first act, and part of the second, let us know that Gerald Arbuthnot (Mr. Charles Quatermaine) has attracted Lord Illingworth, who opens up a career for him by the offer of a private secretaryship; that Gerald is in love with the Puritan maiden from America, who delivers a drawing-room lecture which clearly hits Mrs. Arbuthnot (Miss Marion Terry), who only enters on the scene when the second act is well advanced; and that Lord Illingworth is the father of Mrs. Arbuthnot's son.

The mother wishes to keep her son from his father, but will not reveal the truth. She tells him of Lord Illingworth's betrayal of a young girl, and Gerald observes that no really nice girl would have gone away with a man without being married to him. Then she withdraws her objections. A shriek is heard, and the Puritan maiden rushes in. Lord Illingworth has carried out a threat to kiss her. Gerald threatens to kill him, and then the mother whispers "he is your father"; a bit of good, old Adelphi melodrama which nothing but the acting of Miss Marion Terry prevented from being funnier than any of the jokes. Equally unreal and on the same theatrical plane is the finish, in which Lord Illingworth asks Miss Arbuthnot to marry him, as suggested in a letter by his son; and when she refuses he is guilty of the appalling eadishness of expressing his surprise at meeting his mistress when visiting his own set. She strikes him with a glove; he goes; she weeps; her son and his promised bride come in (the Puritan has softened her convictions about its being just that the sins of the parents shall be visited on the children), and we are left to understand that happiness awaits them in the States.

The usual hesitations of a first night at His Majesty's were more in evidence than usual; but when the pace has been quickened, there will be little fault to find with the acting. As Lady Hunstanton, in whose house the characters meet, Mrs. Charles Calvert was inimitable. The kindly, garrulous old lady, always forgetting things, was presented to the life with clear, incisive, yet never overwrought, touches. Sweetly sympathetic was the Mrs. Arbuthnot of Miss Marion Terry; her facial expression of pain when her son insists upon accompanying Lord Illingworth; the tense emotion of the recognition scene; the pain of the last scene were salient points in a generally fine impersonation. Miss Ellis Jeffreys made a welcome return to London as the smart Mrs. Allenby, with whom Lord Illingworth philanders, and played with all her wonted finesse, and Miss Viola Tree displayed some progress as Hester. Mr. Tree resumed his original part of Lord Illingworth, making up wonderfully young and, in the first act, with a remarkable cream-colored suit of clothes. He gave the part all the ease and polish and man-of-the-worldliness it demands. Mr. Charles Quatermaine seemed somewhat ill at ease as Gerald; Mr. Edmund Maurice was distinctly good as a cleric; and Miss Kate Bishop, Miss Kate Cutler, and Mr. J. Fisher White completed the cast. The reception was quite enthusiastic.

Morning Leader.

HIS MAJESTY'S.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" REPRODUCED.

Perhaps the first thing one notices about "A Woman of No Importance" is the way it has aged. Mr. Tree himself, so, through the medium of the interviewer, he informed the public that the play quite modern, and thinks that on its production 14 years ago, it was in advance of its time.

FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S.

Each of the all-too-short series of Oscar Wilde's plays contained one particularly striking "epigram." The gem of "A Woman of No Importance," the comedy produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket, and revived by His Majesty's, is, of course, the often quoted: "The book of life begins with a man and a woman in a garden—and finishes with revelations."

There are many other "epigrams" in "A Woman of No Importance," some of them mere fireworks, others witty and wise. And there is drama in it. Every character—or at least nearly every play is constructed with Sardouesque skill. Indeed, from one point of view it might be a wittily written, rather mechanical French comedy. From another point of view it is a criticism of smart society's sins and follies, after the manner of Alfred Sudo.

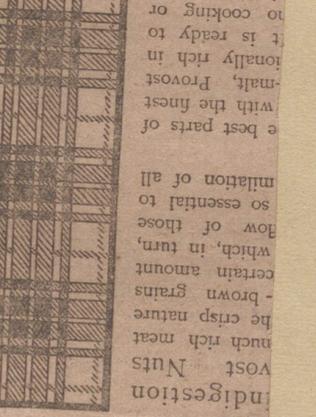
For "A Woman of No Importance" is in its entirety an admirable comedy, untroubled with few equals in modern theatrical literature, and Mr. Tree has done well to give playgoers the opportunity to see it again. The acting last night suffered dreadfully from the common vice of slowness, but the company is an excellent one, including, as it does, in addition to Mr. Tree, Miss Marion Terry, Miss Kate Cutler, Miss Ellis Jeffreys, and Mr. Edmund Maurice.

Star.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A Woman of No Importance."

Oscar Wilde's comedy was revived last night by Mr. Beerbohm Tree with signal success.



Portrait of a woman in a dress, likely related to the play 'A Woman of No Importance'.

The revival of Oscar Wilde's comedy "A Woman of No Importance" attracted a very fashionable and interesting gathering to His Majesty's last night. Perhaps as many eyes were turned on the white-haired figure of Mr. Beerbohm Tree's mother, in a box with her daughter, Mrs. Neville, and Mr. Frank Richardson, as on the dark and vivacious Duchess of Marlborough in a box on the other side of the house.

HIS MAJESTY'S.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

(By OSCAR WILDE.)

Lord Illingworth Mr. TREE
Sir John Pontefract Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Lord Alfred Ruford Mr. EDMUND MAURICE
Mr. Kevil, M.P. Mr. CHARLES ALLEN
The Ven. James Dambory, D.D. Mr. EDWARD BISHOP
Gerald Arbuthnot Mr. CHARLES CALVERT
Francis Mr. MISS KATE CUTLER
Lady Hunstanton Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS
Lady Caroline Pontefract Miss MARION TERRY
Lady Stutfield Miss KATE CUTLER
Mrs. Allenby Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS
Hester Worsley Miss VIOLA TREE
Mrs. Arbuthnot Miss HILDA MOORE
Miss Marion Terry

"The Book of Life begins with a man and woman, and ends with Revelations." This is merely one flower taken at random from the bouquet of oratorical that adorns Oscar Wilde's comedy of manners—and morals, "A Woman of No Importance," which Mr. Tree revived at His Majesty's last night. Indeed, epigram jostles epigram with such extravagant prodigality that one can hardly recall a twentieth of the worldly wisdom of the wayward genius who fifteen years ago had built up for himself quite a little kingdom in society. Only two acts of "A Woman of No Importance" have any vital relation to the drama; the other two are a dazzling display of verbal fireworks. It is a game of "you let off a cracker and I'll follow with coloured fire" all the time, and Mr. Tree gets most of the coloured fire, which is the nature of things—and as the actor-manager should do so. We said that only two acts have any relation to the drama; we doubt if they have (in the author's conscience and brain) any relation to life. We are almost convinced the characters have none but that they serve an admirable purpose of standing up like so many immoral "Aunt Sallies" to be bowled over by the pitiless scorn of the Puritan and unsophisticated American heiress, Hester Worsley, who, what with her sermons and her habit of eaves-dropping strikes one as a bit of a prig, despite her self-righteous behaviour in the end, we can tolerate the inhumanity and lack of realism of the play. Besides one love insincerity when they are served up with the sautes piquantes of Oscar Wilde. No one believes in half his philosophy, but while it has the evanescence of champagne it has also its sparkle, and therefore when we chuckled over the discomfiture and virtuous snort of the Archdeacon when he was compelled to listen to Illingworth's easy views of morality our sense of propriety did not suffer because our sense of humour was titillated. We are not going to recapitulate the story. It can be told in a couple of tragic sentences. The father of a nameless boy discovers that the man whom he is about to appoint as his secretary and confidant is his own illegitimate son. The instant of fatherhood is aroused, and there is a strong battle between the dilapidated father, the ambitious son, and the outraged mother for the mastery. Lord Illingworth's trump card is marriage and respectability for trampled honour, but the mother rejects the proposal and wins over her son after a desperate fight, and with the aid of the American puritan, Hester Worsley's pitiless castigation of the Smart Set is one which certain social crusaders before the public would give their ears to have been the work of.

The Smart Set lies like a leper in purple—a dead thing painted with gold." Miss Marion Terry made a striking success in the part of the wretched woman last night. Her half-strangled tones of grief and despair in her recital of her pitiful story, and her appeal to her son not to leave her brought a lump to the throat of the most case-hardened playgoer, and she made an appeal to the emotions which gave the play a touch of distinction and humanity, which his obvious shallowness did not merit. Mr. Tree's man of the world was a splendid piece of natural acting, and when he has corrected a noticeable hesitation in his speech, he should make his Lord Illingworth a delightful study. Mrs. Charles Calvert contributed an unctuous piece of comedy, as the inconsequential Lady Hunstanton, while Miss Ellis Jeffreys was simply bewitching as the flirtatious Mrs. Allenby. Miss Viola Tree showed distinct progress in the ingenué part of Hester Worsley. She is learning the difference between art and the artificial. She sang a ballad embellished in the second act. A brilliant house bubbled over with laughter in a genteel way, of course, and everybody spent a delightful evening.

At the conclusion of the performance of "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's Theatre last night there were loud and apparently sincere calls of "Author!"

Star.

AN AUTHOR OF NO IMPORTANCE.

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Westminster Gazette.

REVIVAL OF "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree has at last followed Mr. George Alexander's example, and we are allowed to see another play by Oscar Wilde. He is not in quite such a happy position as Mr. Alexander, being able to bring down from his shelf "The Importance of Being Earnest" or "Lady Windermere's Fan," to both of which rather than to "A Woman of No Importance," one would turn in any attempt to put the author in his proper place in the hierarchy of English literature. "A Woman of No Importance" has a troublesome plot, meant to be taken seriously, and the present generation, if last night's audience is a fair sample of it, develops at the thrilling moments a marked tendency to cough. Nor can I blame it. The story of Lord Illingworth and Rachel Arbuthnot and their son Gerald was never one to rouse much enthusiasm; the great scenes where the son would strike his father but for the mother's despairing revelation of their relationship, and where the father, having failed to get his son back, grossly insults the woman he has wronged and is struck across the face with his own glove, are quite too obviously "great scenes," and they have not improved with time. They have grown very dusty on their shelf, and not all the art of Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry can rub them bright again—if, indeed, there was ever much brightness about them. It is and always was an extraordinary thing that the man who had an eye for the absurdity of everything else upon this earth had not an eye for the absurdity of theatrical effect—unless, indeed, the fact be that he had, and, having defied convention in most other things, deliberately defied originality in this. Possibly it delighted him to startle people by being strictly ordinary in his plots, this being the only touch of the unexpected left to him after having turned all the conventions of customary morality inside out. Possibly contenting himself with inverting sentences, he decided to leave it to Mr. Shaw to invert situations. But most probable of all is that he was simply looking for an opportunity for the exercise of his fascinating and wayward wit and let the rest go hang; but in that case it is strange that he allowed himself to spend so much time in a determined effort to be solemn.

However, it is for its general conversation that "A Woman of No Importance" is worthy of a descent from the shelf. There is in it plenty of the inverted proverb style of humour in which Wilde revelled, and in which it is so easy for others to revel in imitation; typical specimen—"Oh, don't be moderate; nothing succeeds like excess" (which, by the way, Mr. Tree spoiled by lack of spontaneity; he spoke of it as if he were thinking it out). Slightly higher in rank is the remark "I can survive anything except death," paralleled in another play by "I can resist anything except temptation"; but better still is that unforgettable gem, "He: The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden. She: Yes; and ends with Revelations." I have also a kindly feeling for the philosophy in "Always kiss women who talk seriously; it's such a tremendous surprise to them." It recalls, and may have been modelled on, Disraeli's "You darling!" to the Female Suffragist who had addressed him earnestly for half an hour. Best of all, however, are the sudden and striking little glimpses of depth of feeling, glowing little touches of pure poetry, to be met with here and there, which reveal the reality of the man behind the mask of cynical and brilliant dilettantism, and heighten, if there is anything that could heighten, the tragedy of his end. It is when the plot stands still and the author has forgotten it and is talking of things in general that "A Woman of No Importance" becomes a thing which our literature could ill spare; and, whatever may be the result from the point of view of popular success, there can be no doubt about Mr. Tree's claim to gratitude for this long-overdue revival.

Mr. Tree himself, of course, played Lord Illingworth once more. He has an air of distinction, but hardly gives an impression of a dazzling mind, and he took the whole thing rather too slowly and in too low a key. In fact, there were times when he was inaudible; it is perhaps difficult, after a long absence from drawing-room comedy, to strike the right note. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as Mrs. Allenby, and Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton, are both perfectly and entirely delightful; they have the tone and manner of it to the life. The Archdeacon with the decrepit wife at home is a figure of farce, and is broadly played as such by Mr. Edmund Maurice; and Miss Viola Tree plays prettily as the ingénue from America. Miss Marion Terry's Mrs. Arbuthnot is a beautifully tender and gracious figure. Not for her are wit and epigrams—her part it is to bear the plot; and, despite its melodrama, she plays throughout with perfect sincerity and perfect art.

Star.

AN AUTHOR OF NO IMPORTANCE.

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Pall Mall Gazette.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" REVIVED.

Although fourteen years have passed since "A Woman of No Importance" was first acted, its comedy scenes have lost little of their sparkle. Now and then, perhaps, the wit seems a little laboured, but upon the whole these parts of the play act as brilliantly as ever, and the jokes that set us roaring in 1893 performed the same kindly office for us at His Majesty's Theatre last night. It is in the serious passages that the seams of the play have begun to gape somewhat and its fabric to show rather threadbare, particularly in the speeches of that artificial young embodiment of American Puritanism, Hester Worsley. Her general attitude was voted excessive fourteen years ago. To-day she seems more than ever out of the picture. Yet this was probably the character on which the author most prided himself. 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FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S.

Each of the all-too-short series of Oscar Wilde's plays contained one particularly striking "epigram." The gem of "A Woman of No Importance," the comedy produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket, had revived by him last night at His Majesty's, of course, the often quoted "The book of life begins with a man and a woman in a garden—and finishes with revelations."

Star. HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A Woman of No Importance."

Oscar Wilde's comedy was revived last night by Mr. Beerbohm Tree with signal success. Since its production fourteen years ago the world, as everybody knows, has grown ever so much older and wiser; but it has not outgrown truth—a reason why "A Woman of No Importance" must appeal to all intelligent men and women of good-will as one of the few vital, dramatic things of our generation. It was not only an achievement; it was a sign and a promise. Discovery of its faults is easy; condemnation of them no less easy. Here the comic author reverts to the day and mood of Greece, and we have a modern mirror of that earlier day. "A Woman of No Importance" is enriched by human passion and emotional sincerity which pierce the external wrapping of a perverse and artificial wit, and cause us to thrill in response to them. In sum, the theme is barefaced melodrama, but who would not have melodrama so suffused with joy and wit? It is true that the people of this comedy do not speak in dramatic movement. They do sit still and comment on the passing show in their own brilliant and casual dialectic. But who would not have this commentary, even though all the characters talk in the same accents of paradox, for it touches life at many points, and touches it keenly, not with the merciful surgery of some humane healer of wounds in the body politic, but with the shrewd knife of some bold inquisitor? One feels through the whole of the first act, and much after, as if humanity has been handed over to "the secular arm," and is being slowly sliced to death.

Still this dialogue, supple, nervous, witty, embodying a purely egotistic philosophy of life, is one of the rich treasures of the drama of to-day. It illumines the melodramatic action, just as the plot redeems the dialogue from inhumanity. It is singular to observe how completely Wilde anticipated many of the avowed champions of the women's cause. Whatever its other defects, the play vibrates with a very beautiful and tender sympathy for womanhood. Certainly the story of the meeting of Lord Illingworth with his son and the mother of his son twenty years after the lad's birth is told with a passionate sense of the injustice of the world towards the weak. Illingworth, to regain his son, would marry his former mistress, but also, a good woman, repulses him with cool scorn at first, and later, when the man's tongue is tipped with gall, with an anguished blow. He is a humanitarian and just, but will applaud the blow.

Such a comedy, of course, needs most delicate acting for its due interpretation. Happily, in Mr. Tree there is almost the ideal exponent of Illingworth. This is his métier. And he resumes an old triumph. He has an air. He can say—when he remembers his words—Illingworth's brilliant something—things as if he were coining them on the spot. His manner is subtle, as with the intellectual arrogance of the moments last night when he was particularly happy. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," he says to Mrs. Arbuthnot about the irrefragable better than his tone fully regretted, mingled with mere politeness. His calculating insolence as he flung his last brutal insult at Mrs. Arbuthnot was another very clever indication of character reflected in saccato words. Miss Marion Terry's performance as Mrs. Arbuthnot was pathetic and sincere, but it seemed to miss the deeper significance of the part. There was nothing in her of the bitter suffering that had scorched her in the earlier scenes, and without that evidence the character becomes, if not invariable, at least unconvincing. Miss Ellis Jeffreys uttered her witticisms with too self-conscious a knowledge of their merit, while Mrs. Calvert's deliciously comic and vicious air belied her performance in a difficult and ungracious part given by Mr. Charles Calvert as the young Arbuthnot. The stage manager antics as the Archdeacon; they are of farce, not comedy. Perhaps the most noteworthy pronounced advance in her work made by Miss Viola Tree. Although the emotional demands of the last act were beyond her present powers and experience, she played with real charm and unaffected sincerity in the earlier scenes, presenting a simple and, therefore, touching study of the young Puritan maiden from America who sets as a fairy-godmother in the end. A play not to be missed.

HIS MAJESTY'S.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" (By OSCAR WILDE.)

Lord Illingworth..... Mr. J. BEERBOHM TREE
Sir John Pentecost..... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Lord Alfred Ruford..... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Mr. Keble, M.P..... Mr. CHARLES CALVERT
The Ven. James Dalrymple..... Mr. CHARLES CALVERT
Gerald Arbuthnot..... Mr. EDWARD MAURICE
Francis..... Mr. F. COWLEY WHEAT
Lady Caroline Pentecost..... Miss KATE BISHOP
Lady Stufeld..... Miss KATE CUTLER
Mrs. Albany..... Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS
Hester Worsley..... Miss VIOLA TREE
Miss..... Miss HILDA MOORE
Mrs. Arbuthnot..... Miss MARION TERRY

"The Book of Life begins with a man and woman, and ends—with Revelations." This is merely one flower taken at random from the bouquet of epigrams that accompany Oscar Wilde's comedy of manners—and morals, "A Woman of No Importance," which Mr. Tree revived at His Majesty's last night. Indeed, epigram justifies epigram with such extravagant prodigality that one can barely recall a twentieth of the worldly wisdom of the wayward genius who fifteen years ago had built up for himself quite a little kingdom in society. Only two acts of "A Woman of No Importance" have any vital relation to the drama; the other two are a dazzling display of verbal fireworks. It is a game of "you let off a cracker and I'll follow with coloured fire" all the time, and Mr. Tree gets most of the coloured fire, which in the nature of things—and as the actor-manager should do so. We said that only two acts have any vital relation to the drama; we doubt if they have (in the author's conscience and brain) any relation to life. We are almost convinced the characters have none but as they serve the admirable purpose of standing up like so many delicate and minutely inscribed figures on the immortal "Aunt Sally," to be bowled over by the pitiless scorn of the Puritan and unopprobriated American heiress, as Hester Worsley, who when with her serious and her habit of eavesdropping strikes one as a bit of a prig, despite her self-righteous behaviour in the end, we can tolerate the inhumanity and lack of realism of the play. Besides one lone immortelle which they are served up with the sauce piquante of Oscar Wilde. No one believes in half his philosophy, but while it has the occasional laugh at it is not to be converted, and therefore when we checked over the discomfort and virtuous snort of the Archdeacon who he was compelled to listen to Illingworth's easy view of morality our sense of propriety did not suffer because our sense of humour was titillated. We are not going to recapitulate the story. It can be told in a couple of tragic sentences. The father of a nameless boy discovers that the man whom he is about to appoint as his secretary and confidant is his own illegitimate son. The instinct of fatherhood is aroused, and there is a strong battle between the dilettante father, the ambitious son, and the outraged mother for the masonry. Lord Illingworth's trump card is marriage and respectability for trampled honour, but the mother rejects and the outraged mother over her son after a desperate fight, and with the aid of the American puritan, Hester Worsley's pitiless castigation of the Smart Set is one which certain social criticism before the public would give their ears to have been the author of.

The Smart Set lies like a leper in purple—a dead thing painted with gold." Miss Marion Terry made a striking success in the part of the wronged woman last night. Her half-strangled tones of grief and shame in her recital of her pitiful story, and her appeal to her son not to leave her brought a lump to the throat of the most case-hardened playgoer, and she made an appeal to the emotions which gave the play a touch of distinction and humanity, which its obvious shallowness did not merit. Mr. Tree's man of the world was a splendid piece of natural acting, and when he has corrected a noticeable hesitation in his speech, he should make his Lord Illingworth a delightful study. Mrs. Charles Calvert contributed an unobscured piece of comedy as the incoherent Lady Hunstanton, while Miss Ellis Jeffreys was simply bewitching as the flirtatious Mrs. Albany. Miss Viola Tree showed distinct progress in the ingénue part of Hester Worsley. She learned the difference between art and the artificial. She sang a ballad enchantingly in the second act. A brilliant house bubbled over with laughter in a gentle way, of course, and everybody spent a delightful evening.

Star. AN AUTHOR OF NO IMPORTANCE.

The revival of Oscar Wilde's comedy "A Woman of No Importance" attracted a very fashionable and interesting gathering to His Majesty's last night. Perhaps as many eyes were turned on the white-haired figure of Mr. Beerbohm Tree's mother, in a box with her daughter, Mrs. Neville, and Mr. Frank Richardson, as on the dark and majestic Theatre last night there were loud and apparently sincere calls of "Author."

Westminster Gazette.

REVIVAL OF "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree has at last followed Mr. George Alexander's example, and we are allowed to see another play by Oscar Wilde. He is not in quite such a happy position as Mr. Alexander, being able to bring down from his shelf "The Importance of Being Earnest" or "Lady Windermere's Fan," to one of his rather than to "A Woman of No Importance," one would think in any attempt to put the author in his proper place in the hierarchy of English literature. "A Woman of No Importance" has a troublesome plot, meant to be taken seriously, and present generation, if last night's audience is a fair sample of developments at the thrilling moments a marked tendency to come Nor can I blame it. The story of Lord Illingworth and Gerald Arbuthnot and their son Gerald was never one to rouse enthusiasm; the great scenes where the son would strike his father but for the mother's despairing revelation of their relationship, and where the father, having failed to get his son back, grossly insults the woman he has wronged and is struck across the face with his own glove, are quite too obviously "grotesque scenes," and they have not improved with time. They have grown very dusty on their shelf, and not all the art of Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry can rub them bright again—if, indeed, there was ever much brightness about them. It is and always was an extraordinary thing that the man who had an eye for the absurdity of everything else upon this earth had not an eye for the absurdity of theatrical effect—unless, indeed, the fact be that he had, and, having defied convention in most other things, deliberately defied originality in this. Possibly it delighted him to startle people by being strictly ordinary in his plots, this being the one touch of the unexpected left to him after having turned all the conventions of customary morality inside out. Possibly contenting himself with inverting sentences. But most probable of all is that he was simply looking for an opportunity for the exercise of his fascinating and wayward wit and let the rest go hang; but in that case it is strange that he allowed himself to spend so much time in a determined effort to be solemn.

However, it is for its general conviction that "A Woman of No Importance" is worthy of a descent from the shelf. There is in it plenty of the inverted proverb style of humour in which Wilde revelled, and in which it is so easy for others to revel in imitation; typical specimen—"Oh, don't be moderate; nothing succeeds like excess" (which, by the way, Mr. Tree spoiled by lack of spontaneity; he spoke of it as if he were thinking it out). Slightly higher in rank is the remark "I can survive anything except death," paralleled in another play by "I can resist anything except temptation"; but better still is that unforgettable gem, "He: The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden. She: Yes; and ends with Revelations." I have also a kindly feeling for the philosophy in "Always kiss women who talk seriously; it's such a tremendous surprise to them." It recalls, and may have been modelled on, Disraeli's "You darling!" to the Female Suffragist who had addressed him earnestly for half an hour. Best of all, however, are the sudden and striking little glimpses of depth of feeling, glowing little touches of pure poetry, to be met with here and there, which reveal the reality of the man behind the mask of cynical and brilliant dilettantism, and heighten, if there is anything that could heighten, the tragedy of his end. It is when the plot stands still and the author has forgotten it and is talking of things in general that "A Woman of No Importance" becomes a thing which our literature could ill spare; and, whatever may be the result from the point of view of popular success, there can be no doubt about Mr. Tree's claim to gratitude for this long-overdue revival.

Mr. Tree himself, of course, played Lord Illingworth once more. He has an air of distinction, but hardly gives an impression of a dazzling mind, and he took the whole thing rather too slowly and in too low a key. In fact, there were times when he was inaudible; it is perhaps difficult, after a long absence from drawing-room comedy, to strike the right note. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as Mrs. Albany, and Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton, are both perfectly and entirely delightful; they have the tone and manner of it to the life. The Archdeacon with the decrepit wife at home is a figure of farce, and is broadly played as such by Mr. Edmund Maurice; and Miss Viola Tree plays prettily as the ingénue from America. Miss Marion Terry's Mrs. Arbuthnot is a beautifully tender and gracious figure. Not for her are wit and epigrams—her part it is to bear the plot; and, despite its melodrama, she plays throughout with perfect sincerity and perfect art.

Star.

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Pall Mall Gazette.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" REVIVED.

Although fourteen years have passed since "A Woman of No Importance" was first acted, its comedy scenes have lost little of their sparkle. Now and then, perhaps, the wit seems a little laboured, but upon the whole these parts of the play act as brilliantly as ever, and the jokes that set us roaring in 1893 performed the same kindly office for us at His Majesty's Theatre last night. It is in the serious passages that the seams of the play have begun to gape somewhat and its fabric to show rather threadbare. Particularly in the speeches of that artificial young embodiment of American Puritanism, Hester Worsley. Her general attitude was voted excessive developments at the thrilling moments a marked tendency to come Nor can I blame it. The story of Lord Illingworth and Gerald Arbuthnot and their son Gerald was never one to rouse enthusiasm; the great scenes where the son would strike his father but for the mother's despairing revelation of their relationship, and where the father, having failed to get his son back, grossly insults the woman he has wronged and is struck across the face with his own glove, are quite too obviously "grotesque scenes," and they have not improved with time. They have grown very dusty on their shelf, and not all the art of Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry can rub them bright again—if, indeed, there was ever much brightness about them. It is and always was an extraordinary thing that the man who had an eye for the absurdity of everything else upon this earth had not an eye for the absurdity of theatrical effect—unless, indeed, the fact be that he had, and, having defied convention in most other things, deliberately defied originality in this. Possibly it delighted him to startle people by being strictly ordinary in his plots, this being the one touch of the unexpected left to him after having turned all the conventions of customary morality inside out. Possibly contenting himself with inverting sentences. But most probable of all is that he was simply looking for an opportunity for the exercise of his fascinating and wayward wit and let the rest go hang; but in that case it is strange that he allowed himself to spend so much time in a determined effort to be solemn.

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Glasgow Herald.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)
London, Wednesday Night.
It is only for the opportunity it affords of seeing Mr. Tree in an evening-dress character, his revival of Oscar Wilde's "A Woman of No Importance" is certain to prove popular. The satirical qualities of the piece, and the sparkling nature of the dialogue, seemed just as irresistible to-night as at the Haymarket thirteen years ago, when Mr. Tree first appeared as Lord Illingworth. Mr. Tree, who is practically the only one of the original cast in the present revival, looked a young man of thirty, and played with the same quiet force that distinguished his impersonation at the Haymarket. Miss Marion Terry as "Mrs. Arbuthnot," Miss Ellis Jeffreys as the giddy Mrs. Albany, and Mrs. Charles Calvert as the aged and delightfully irresponsible Lady Hunstanton, were among the conspicuous impersonations in a generally fine performance.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" (By OSCAR WILDE.)

Lord Illingworth..... Mr. TREE
Sir John Pentecost..... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Lord Alfred Ruford..... Mr. J. FISHER WHITE
Mr. Keble, M.P..... Mr. CHARLES CALVERT
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Hester Worsley..... Miss VIOLA TREE
Miss..... Miss HILDA MOORE
Mrs. Arbuthnot..... Miss MARION TERRY

"When 'A Woman of No Importance' was first produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket Theatre on April 19, 1893, the general feeling was that there was too much dialogue for the action of the play, and that the epigrams delayed the unfolding of the story. It is probable that taste in matters of the theatre has considerably changed in the fourteen years which have elapsed since then, for last night at His Majesty's Theatre the melodramatic of the play seemed old-fashioned and out of date, and the really enjoyable part was the brilliant wit, which amused as much as ever, though it has no longer its original freshness, since

"Most can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed."
In truth, the verbal brilliance has worn better than the melodramatic plot, for wit is always young, whereas we have advanced considerably in the matter of plots and their unfolding since 1893.

The piece is most admirably cast. Of the original representatives only two remain, Mr. Tree resuming the part of Lord Illingworth, in which he made so notable a success at the Haymarket Theatre. He delivers the clever epigrams with which the plot is studded without a trace of effort, and when it comes to the drama he is equally masterful. Mr. Tree plays the part without exaggeration, and with quiet distinction. Mr. Charles Allan again resumes the part of Mr. Keble, M.P., and plays the political bore with absolute fidelity. As the grizzled youth, Gerald Arbuthnot, Mr. Charles Quartermaine succeeds Mr. Fred Terry. He is rather inclined to emphasise the serious side of the character, and to force the melodramatic note. Arbuthnot wants taking with a very tight hand, for it is an ungraceful part, and one peculiar relationship in which he stands to Lord Illingworth makes his position in the last act one that demands not too tragic a bearing. Very clever character sketches are given by Mr. Edmund Maurice and Mr. J. Fisher White. Mr. Tree has found the ideal Mrs. Arbuthnot to succeed Mrs. Bernard Beere. Miss Marion Terry has such a winning personality, and so great a power of commanding sympathy, that she makes whatever she does appear to be right. This quality is needed in Mrs. Arbuthnot, for the woman of no importance verges dangerously on the unsympathetic, especially in the last act, until Lord Illingworth insults her, but Miss Terry carries it all through triumphantly, and almost makes us forget that in reality Lord Illingworth is rather harshly dealt with. Miss Viola Tree succeeds Miss Horlock as the American heiress, Hester Worsley, and with her girlish charm made even the Puritanical and ill-mannered lecture in the second act seem reasonable. It is a peculiarity of "A Woman of No Importance" that the characters which are meant to be blameless and those with which we have the least sympathy, but which luckily both Miss Marion Terry and Miss Viola Tree have such a charm of manner and personality that the words they have to speak are, as it were, glossed over. Mrs. Charles Calvert is delightfully comic as Lady Hunstanton, in which she succeeds that "grand dame," Miss Rose Leclercq, and Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Miss Kate Bishop, and Miss Kate Cutler are excellent as the three distinguished guests of Lady Hunstanton. The play is beautifully mounted, and was received last night with the warmest applause.

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Evening News.

"SPHINKES WITH-OUT SECRETS."

EPIGRAMS, A POOR PLAY, AND A GREAT ACTRESS.

Mrs. Albany (Miss Ellis Jeffreys, as usual in a wonderful gown) Define Woman!

Lord Illingworth (Mr. Tree, rather like the German Emperor with moustache modified): Sphinxes without secrets!

Or again
Lady Stufeld (Miss Kate Cutler): Lord Illingworth, what is life?

Lord Illingworth: Life is a mauvais quart d'heure made up of exquisite moments.

That is the sort of thing cultured people liked or pretended to like or Oscar Wilde imagined them to like when Oscar Wilde wrote plays. Because people don't like that sort of thing any more, because our ideals of art are higher, because we want realities and not idealities in our pictures, our books and our plays, therefore "A Woman of No Importance" is out of date, and one cannot predict success for Mr. Tree's revival of it last night at His Majesty's Theatre. Plays that live are plays that touch the heart of the masses, which changes but little from generation to generation. Oscar Wilde dismissed the many and wrote for the cultivated few. He wrote for the only people who are influenced by ideas, who grow and develop every year, and he has been left far behind.

The very problem of the play shows that Lord Illingworth has often been the sort of his private secretary to young Gerald Arbuthnot (Mr. Charles Quartermaine). Mrs. Arbuthnot, Gerald's mother, is content that Lord Illingworth is Gerald's father, the man who as George Harford seduced and then refused to marry her. She refuses, very naturally, to allow her son to become Lord Illingworth's secretary, but her objections are overruled by Lord Illingworth himself, who deduces her to tell the boy what is his actual relationship. Then Gerald sees Lord Illingworth try to kiss Hester Worsley. Gerald loves Hester Worsley, and tries to get Lord Illingworth to kill him. Mrs. Arbuthnot intervenes, and to prevent the tragedy discloses the secret.

THE PROBLEM.

When Gerald determines to make Lord Illingworth marry his mother, and in the eyes of a conventional world right her. He is astonished and horrified when she declines. Lord Illingworth is twenty years her senior, and she is not going to let him ruin the rest of it as her husband. Gerald is only induced to refrain from his resolution by the intervention of Hester Worsley, who supports his mother. Lord Illingworth, who whose breast a somewhat tardy general one more effort to win his son by offering to make him his heir. Mrs. Arbuthnot informs him that this is quite unnecessary, for Hester Worsley, being American, is rich. Exit Lord Illingworth.

Now the central point of the play is Lord Illingworth's marriage to Mrs. Arbuthnot, supposed to believe that even after twenty years Mrs. Arbuthnot ought to be "righted" by becoming Lord Illingworth's wife. Gerald is quite an ordinary young man, with quite the accepted ideas on social subjects, and he believes that his mother ought to jump at the chance of being married. He supposes that is what any woman under any circumstances at any moment during those twenty years would have given her ears for. That is what Society demands.

Perhaps that is what Society did demand when Oscar Wilde wrote "A Woman of No Importance." Nowadays there is not a single man or woman of ordinary heart or intelligence who would believe for a moment that Mrs. Arbuthnot should make the rest of her life miserable by marrying Lord Illingworth. Wilde started his general idea by posing a question: "What would he be thought to have long ago accepted. We have broadened immensely in our views of life. Wilde may have been one of the forces that helped us to broaden. Granted! But that does not make his play seem any the less psychologically absurd. Mr. Tree's revival is interesting only because it serves to show how far we have progressed, how much saner and healthier is our attitude towards social subjects than in the time of Oscar Wilde.

EPIGRAMS.

Apart from that, even, the play is not good. Its technique is childish, its entrances and exits often perfectly inconsequent. The dialogue consists mainly in epigrams and remarks leading up to epigrams on subjects such as Life, Woman, and other things in capital letters, which ordinary people don't talk about. Very few of the epigrams are good, very few mean anything in particular. Oscar Wilde imagined that to say nothing as if it were a cult, to be the essence of wit. The cultist was in his day thought that it was. We only find it tedious. People don't conceit symmetrical aphorisms in moment of tense emotion.

Mr. Tree has been deceived. Because a few select spirits in France and Germany have started a cult of Wilde and tardily learned to appreciate Wilde's far-abled disciple Bernard Shaw, because clearly thought the time had come for a resurrection of Wilde in England. He is wrong. The time will never come. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as the woman of the world result at Mrs. Calvert as Lady Hunstanton was charming. Mr. Quartermaine was earnest if a little crude in a very severely successful as the young American. Mr. Tree was singularly inept in the mistake of trying to make puppets of the people—an impossible task. As the only human character in the play Mrs. Arbuthnot herself, Miss Marion Terry was magnificent.

Daily Express,

FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S.

Each of the all-too-short series of Oscar Wilde's plays contained one particularly striking "epigram." The gem of "A Woman of no Importance," the comedy produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket, and revived by him last night at His Majesty's, is, of course, the often quoted: "The book of life begins with a man and a woman in a garden—and finishes with revelations."

There are many other "epigrams" in "A Woman of no Importance," some of them mere fireworks, others witty and wise. And there is drama in it.

Every character—or at least nearly every other character—has individuality. The play is constructed with Sardouesque skill. Indeed, from one point of view it might be a wittily written, rather mechanical French comedy. From another point of view it is a criticism of smart society's sins and follies, after the manner of Alfred Sutro.

It was curious that the entirely artificial "letting-off" smart things with the characters grouped round the stage like minstrels at a "sit round" was, after years, every bit as effective as the dramatic intrigue.

For "A Woman of no Importance" is in its entirety an admirable comedy, unhappily with few equals in modern theatrical literature, and Mr. Tree has done well to give playgoers the opportunity to see it again.

The acting last night suffered dreadfully from the common vice of slowness, but the company is an excellent one, including, as it does, in addition to Mr. Tree, Miss Marion Terry, Miss Kate Cutler, Miss Ellis Jeffreys, and Mr. Edmund Maurice.