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Oscar Wilde  
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Vol. 9

May 23. 1907. Sportsman

HIS MAJESTY'S.

"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 Portefract ..... 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 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 coruscation 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 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 he 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 as they serve the admirable purpose of standing up like so many immoral "Aunt Sallys" 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 insincerities when they are served up with the sauce piquante of Oscar Wilde. No one believes in half his philosophy, but while it has the evanescence of champagne it has also its sparkle, and to laugh at it is not to be converted, and therefore when we chuckled over the discomfort 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 instinct of fatherhood is aroused, and there is a strong battle between the diletante 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 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 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 ingenue part of Hester Worsley. She is learning 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 genteel way, of course, and everybody spent a delightful evening.

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, not 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 it 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 with perfect sincerity and perfect art.

## 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 goodwill 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 Congreve, and we have a modern mirror of manners. But, differing from the method 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 "comédie surhumaine" do not expound themselves, so to speak, in dramatic movement. They do but sit still and comment on the passing show in their own brilliant and cruel 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 callous 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.

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Still this dialogue, supple, nervous, witty, embodying a purely egotistical 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 she, 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. And no man, humanitarian and just, but will applaud the blow.

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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-nothings as if he were coining them on the spot. His manner is subtle, not so much with instinctive pride of race as with the intellectual arrogance of the artist in hedonism. There were two moments last night when he was particularly happy. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," he says to Mrs. Arbuthnot about the irrevocable past, and nothing could have expressed better than his tone futile regret 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 the shadow of a sneer and the stabbing, staccato 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 love to hate, and without that evidence the character becomes, if not inexplicable, 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 vivacious air belied her assertions of stupidity. An admirable performance in a difficult and ungracious rôle was given by Mr. Charles Quatermaine as young Arbuthnot. The stage manager should repress Mr. Edmund Maurice's antics as the Archdeacon; they are of farce, not comedy. Perhaps the most noteworthy fact regarding the acting was the 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 acts as fairy-godmother in the end. A play not to be missed.

despite its melodrama, she plays thro  
and perfect art.

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 on the other side of the house.

# Star.

## AN AUTHOR OF NO IMPORTANCE.

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!"

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23 May 1907

"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. He was a poet, and this was one of his dreams. The Lords and Ladies of his play are all society types, brightened with his own wit; but this figure he composed with his eyes piously fixed not on humanity, but on the stars—those stars, by the way, which Lady Hunstanton, in an inimitable passage, takes under her patronage, and offers to her guests as a sort of additional entertainment. Through the lips of Hester the author pronounced his rebuke of the insincerities and shams of the Hunstanton circle. We believe he meant the censure to be a crushing one, that he penned the girl's speeches under the stress of genuine emotion. But the effort took him out of his depth; and last night, for all Miss Viola Tree's girlish sincerity, and the added charm of her adorably tall and slender figure moving so gracefully in Lady Hunstanton's drawing-room, the young lady seemed even more unreal than the shams she so despised.

The greater part of the play, however, is sprinkled with the peculiar but very genuine wit for which the author was famous and in which no other writer has since approached him. Delivered with delightful unconsciousness by Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton, with painful care by Mr. Tree as Lord Illingworth, and with perfect ease and gaiety by Miss Ellis Jeffreys as Mrs. Allenby, flash after flash drew a roar from the audience. Mrs. Calvert, in particular, was in great comic form. There was less of the Grande Dame in the impersonation than when the late Miss Rose Leclercq played the part. That lamented actress conferred an intonation and bearing upon such characters that would have been voted "distinguished" at Hatfield itself! But Mrs. Calvert was a perfectly conceivable old lady; while the drollery of her look and often of her silence was as rich as was that of her speech. As to Miss Jeffreys, there is no need to say how attractive a figure she made, or how wittily she gave the amusing speech in the third act describing the Ideal Man. Mr. Tree, unfortunately, was seen at a long way from his best. During the whole evening he seemed uncomfortable with his moustache, and for the rest of it he was visibly uncomfortable with his lines. Now and then, however, we had reminders of the highly effective performance of fourteen years ago; and probably when the actor's usual nervousness on first nights has worn off Lord Illingworth will be himself again. Unfortunately, much the same applies to Miss Marion Terry, whose conception of the character of Mrs. Arbuthnot—so superbly played by Mrs. Bernard Beere on the original production—was seriously marred in execution by the actress's dependence on the prompter. Here, again, the audiences to come will be happier than last night's. Mr. Edmund Maurice slightly over-acted the part of the Archdeacon, but the author's humour held its own; and Miss Kate Bishop as Lady Caroline, Mr. Charles Allan as Mr. Kelvil, the Nonconformist M.P., and Miss Kate Cutler as Lady Stutfield, also made their parts stand out well. In the character of Gerald Arbuthnot Mr. Charles Quartermaine was not happily suited. An actor with a lighter, more boyish, touch was wanted, and here, again, the emotional scenes suffered.

The play is presented with the proscenium reduced to a size suitable to drawing-room comedy, and is staged with Mr. Tree's usual good taste, the garden scene of the first act being a particularly pretty one. It should also be stated that many of the ladies wear beautiful dresses, though the task of their description is beyond us—"that way madness lies." The revival was received with hearty applause after the first three acts, but rather less at the finish of the fourth—a fact attributable, we think, to the defects in the performance alluded to above. The lines play in the world will be killed by what musicians would call an uncertain attack.

# Glasgow Herald.

## "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

London, Wednesday Night.

If 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 Allenby, and Mrs Charles Calvert as the aged and delightfully proper Mrs Ingham, 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 Pontefract .....	Mr. J. FISHER WHITE.
Lord Alfred Rufford .....	Mr. LANGHORN 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.

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 melodrama 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 part 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. Kelvil, M.P., and plays the political bore with absolute fidelity. As the priggish 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 light hand, for it is an ungrateful part, and the 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 hardly dealt with. Miss Viola Tree succeeds Miss Horlock as the American heiress, Hester Worsley, and with her girlish charm made even the Punitanical 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 are those with which we have the least sympathy, but 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 "grande dame," Miss Rose Leclerq, 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 heartiest applause.

# Evening News,

## "SPHINXES WITHOUT SECRETS."

### EPIGRAMS, A POOR PLAY, AND A GREAT ACTRESS.

Mrs. Allenby (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 Stutfield (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 artificialities 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 Her 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 despised 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. He wrote for one stage of that development, and he has been left far behind.

The very problem of the play shows that Lord Illingworth has offered the post of his private secretary to young Gerald Arbuthnot (Mr. Charles Quartermaine). Mrs. Arbuthnot, Gerald's mother, discovers 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 boy to become Lord Illingworth's secretary, but her objections are overruled by Lord Illingworth himself, who defies her to tell the boy what is their actual relationship. Then Gerald sees Lord Illingworth try to kiss Hester Worsley. Gerald loves Hester Worsley, and rushes at Lord Illingworth to kill him. Mrs. Arbuthnot intervenes, and to prevent the tragedy discloses the secret.

#### THE PROBLEM.

Whereupon 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 has ruined twenty years of her life as her betrayer, and she is not going to let him ruin the rest of it as her husband. Gerald is only induced to relinquish his resolution by the intervention of Hester Worsley, who supports his mother. Lord Illingworth, in whose breast a somewhat tardy sense of paternal affection has been aroused, makes 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 clearly this. Society, represented by Gerald, is 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 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 startled his generation by upsetting an accepted idea. What he sought to prove we 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 it was, or than it was supposed to be, in the time of Oscar Wilde.

#### EPIGRAMS.

Apart from that, even, the play is not good. Its technique is childish, 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 Aristotle was the essence of wit. The "cultured few" of his day thought that it was. We only find it tedious. People don't concoct symmetrical aphorisms in moments of tense emotion.

Yes, Mr. Tree has been deceived. Because a few select spirits in France and Germany have started a cult of Wilde and have revived his plays, because we have tardily learned to appreciate Wilde's far abler disciple Bernard Shaw, because realism is not everything in art, Mr. Tree clearly thought the time had come for a resurrection of Wilde in England. He is wrong. The time will never come.

The acting as a whole was good. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as the woman of the world who delights in being wicked was excellent. Mrs. Calvert as Lady Hunstanton was charming. Mr. Quartermaine was earnest if a little crude in a very difficult part. Miss Viola Tree was scarcely successful as the young American. Mr. Tree was singularly inept as Lord Illingworth. They all made the mistake of trying to make puppets into people—an impossible task. As the only living character in the piece, Mrs. Arbuthnot herself, Miss Marion Terry was magnificent.

Oscar Wilde's play "A Woman of No Importance," which was first played at the Haymarket Theatre fourteen years ago...

Dundee advertiser.

"A Woman of No Importance."

Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance," which was first played at the Haymarket Theatre fourteen years ago...

FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

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

When Oscar Wilde's play is dramatic, intense, and sincere, its effect is stimulating and wholly pleasurable. When it ceases to be a play and becomes a string of epigrams one is conscious of an absolute physical strain...

A strong stand is to be made by Municipal Socialist Sunday Schools. A strong stand is to be made by Municipal Socialist Sunday Schools...

It is all to the good that two of the most important of the native population of India are being educated. It is all to the good that two of the most important of the native population of India...

A THEATRICAL REVIVAL.

Oscar Wilde's wonderful play, "A Woman of No Importance," a comedy in epigrams and a tragedy in morals, was to-night revived at His Majesty's Theatre by Mr. Tree before an audience which seemed to include everybody of importance...

An interest, well warranted by the occasion, brought a crowded house to-night at His Majesty's for Mr. Tree's revival of Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance."

Dundee Courier.

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

REVIVAL IN LONDON.

LONDON, Wednesday. It is nearly 14 years ago that Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance," was first produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket Theatre...

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays...

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays, it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright.

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays, it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr. Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright.

Yorkshire Herald.

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays, it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr. Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright.

Bristol Times.

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New York Herald (Paris)

MR. TREE REVIVES WILDE PLAY. [BY THE HERALD'S SPECIAL WIRE.] LONDON, Thursday.—Oscar Wilde's play "A Woman of No Importance" was revived last night by Mr. Beerbohm Tree...

Handwritten Evening News.

An Oscar Wilde Revival. The revival of Mr. Oscar Wilde's "A Woman of No Importance" by Mr. Tree at His Majesty's Theatre last night received a tremendous reception from a crowded and distinguished audience.

23 May 1907

Oscar Wilde's play "A Woman of No Importance," which was first played at the Haymarket Theatre fourteen years ago...

Dundee Advertiser

"A Woman of No Importance." Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance," which was first played at the Haymarket Theatre fourteen years ago...

FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

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

When Oscar Wilde's play is dramatic, intense, and sincere, its effect is stimulating and wholly pleasurable. When it ceases to be a play and becomes a string of epigrams one is conscious of an absolute physical strain in following it.

It is the story and the characters of "A Woman of No Importance" which hold one—these, and the fine handling of the essentials of the theme, and the strength and earnestness and beauty of the scenes which really matter.

Sandwiched in between large patches of inapposite though always amusing and witty dialogue concerning things in general are moments of strong, affecting, and effective drama, of pathos, sentiment, and charm.

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Brook Times

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I don't think that Lord Ilingworth is a part that suits Mr Tree. He failed this evening to represent the cultured rous, afflicted spasmodically with remorse, with quite the artistic perfection which he throws into some of his roles.

New York Herald (Paris)

MR. TREE REVIVES WILDE PLAY

(BY THE HERALD'S SPECIAL WIRE.) LONDON, Thursday.—Oscar Wilde play "A Woman of No Importance" was revived last night by Mr. Beecham Tree, being given for the first time in London for fourteen years.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

REVIVAL IN LONDON.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, Wednesday. It is nearly 14 years ago that Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance," was first produced by Mr. Tree at the Haymarket Theatre, with Mrs. Bernard Beere in the leading rôle.

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays, it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright.

Handwritten Evening News

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## Post &amp; Mercury,

Oscar Wilde's play "A Woman of No Importance," which was first played at the Haymarket Theatre fourteen years ago, when Mr. Beerbohm Tree was manager of the house, was revived this evening at His Majesty's Theatre. There was a large and fashionable audience, which listened with avidity to the brilliant comedy, sparkling with wit, keen-edged satire, and cynical criticism of the foibles of smart Society. The play has a good deal of intrigue, though of an unconventional sort, but its chief merit lies in its brilliant and clear-cut dialogue, the amusing phrases put into the mouths of the principal characters, and the strange moral doctrines propounded by Lady Hunstanton (Mrs. Calvert), Miss Allenby (Miss Ellis Jeffreys), Lady Caroline Pontefract (Miss Kate Bishop), and one or two others of the dramatis personæ. A breath of truth and honesty is brought into the play by Hester Worsley (Miss Viola Tree), an unsophisticated American, which helps to purify the atmosphere in which the fashionable gossips and scandalmongers live. Mrs. Arbuthnot, too (Miss Marion Terry), though she has made a faux pas in her youth, is a noble type of womanhood, and so is her boy, who turns out to be the son of the man to whom he is engaged as secretary. Two very amusing characters are Mr. Kelvid, M.P. (Mr. Charles Allan), an exaggerated sort of political bore, and Dr. James Daubery (Mr. Edmund Maurice), a ridiculous and impossible clergyman. Mr. Tree himself took the part of Lord Illingworth, which he created on its production. It was a fine all-round company, and the favour with which the play was received owed much to Mr. Tree, to his daughter Viola, to that admirable actress Mrs. Charles Calvert, to Miss Jeffreys, and, of course, to Miss Marion Terry, who took the part which Mrs. Bernard Beere created fourteen years ago—the part which gives its name to the play.

**"A Woman of No Importance."**

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FAMOUS COMEDY REVIVED.

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

When Oscar Wilde's play is dramatic, intense, and sincere, its effect is stimulating and wholly pleasurable. When it ceases to be a play and becomes a string of epigrams one is conscious of an absolute physical strain in following it. The talk is so clever that we would not miss a line, and the effort to follow every twist of the author's nimble wit—albeit one feels, as we felt years ago, that much of it is mechanical and a mere perversion of accepted phrases—grows positively painful. We laughed, but we were irritated, because the brilliant conversation which forms the larger part of the play delays a story which is engrossing in its simple strength and interferes with its action. Curiously enough, when one remembers all that was written in the years gone by, "A Woman of No Importance" lives by reason of its theatrical qualities, its "situations," and its humanity. The epigrams are excrescences, and are forgiven for the sake of the plot! That in a Wilde work proves the irony of things. Years ago, at the Haymarket, when first the play was produced, it was accepted as the very last thing in elegant comedy. Its success at His Majesty's Theatre last night—and it was a very real success—was won by its dramatic qualities, its plot, its "curtains," and several delightful scenes of absolute naturalness and fragrant sincerity. We learned from this revival in what direction we have progressed. To-day, in plays of high calibre, we aim at directness and naturalness in dialogue which exists to carry on the story—though literary merit is welcome if it arises naturally and helps along the progress of the plot. No such highly etherealised, nigger-minstrel methods of wit dragged in by the coat-tails, with the people seated in a semi-circle firing off repartee at each other, would be tolerated to-day. It must be admitted that to-day there is no one living who could do it as well as Wilde; but, granted that, it would be voted inartistic for any one to attempt it.

It is the story and the characters of "A Woman of No Importance" which hold one—these, and the fine handling of the essentials of the theme, and the strength and earnestness and beauty of the scenes which really matter. Now and again one felt uplifted by the unaffected beauty of the writing. The story may be recalled. Years ago a young girl loved and was betrayed by a man who afterwards inherited wealth and a title. She was very trusting; he was a beast. To-day he is the idol of drawing-rooms and the hero of dinner-parties. He is now Lord Illingworth; she has taken the name of Mrs. Arbuthnot. There is a son, Gerald. Not knowing that Gerald is his son, Illingworth offers him the post of private secretary. Then, discovering the truth, and deaf to the entreaties of his mother, who would keep her boy with her and who dreads the association of the brute, the elegant, egotistical, epigrammatic brute, with the young man, Illingworth persists in his intention, because he feels drawn towards the lad; careless of the added agony he inflicts on the woman he has so deeply wronged, he is deaf to her appeals, and is determined to take her son, and his son, from her. The boy is all aglow for the change and the chance it offers. He upbraids his mother for standing in his way. When, with a last desperate effort to dissuade him, she tells him her story, tells him of Illingworth's baseness, without, however, saying that the woman he wronged was herself or that the son who was born was the lad who is listening to her, he opines that "no nice girl" would have succumbed to Illingworth's persuasions, and she must have been as much to blame as he. This scene of the confession of mother to son is intensely poignant and affecting, and it is told beautifully. Only when Illingworth, to win a bet, tries to kiss the girl Gerald loves, and Gerald would strike him, and Mrs. Arbuthnot tells him the truth, is the boy repentant. The story need not be followed further. Illingworth is cast out, in spite of the fact that he yearns for his son, and offers to marry the mother to obtain him—an offer scornfully rejected.

Sandwiched in between large patches of inapposite though always amusing and witty dialogue concerning things in general are moments of strong, affecting, and effective drama, of pathos, sentiment, and charm. The scenes between mother and son, between mother and father, between the sweet, fresh, and pure young American girl who loves Gerald and the "smart set" in which she moves, are wholly delightful. The dramatist knew the force of contrast, and placed a wild flower in the hothouse. Although, perhaps, Hester Worsley could not have "preached" to the company as she does, we readily forgive her for the fresh air she lets in among the unnatural plants. The last act, being comparatively free from those "inverted Rochefoucauldisms" of which we used to write, is the best of all, because it is direct drama.

Wilde's characters, curiously enough, are not subtle. Illingworth is a varnished cad, full of sophistries and egotistical blandishments, but a brute all through. Mrs. Arbuthnot is delightfully primitive. Hester Worsley is almost unnaturally outspoken, a daughter of the fresh American soil. The "smart set" are not people so much as gramophones recording the author's never-failing wit. Very fortunately, each character is in excellent hands at His Majesty's. Miss Marion Terry and Mr. Tree were by no means "letter perfect," but they carried the play to success, she by the superb naturalness and womanliness, the pathos and poignancy of her playing; he by his finesse, his sense of character, his many little illuminating touches. Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Mrs. Charles Calvert, Miss Kate Bishop, and Miss Kate Cutler added point and humour to the playwright's lines; they could not have been better. Mr. Charles Quatermaine, as Gerald, the son, gave earnestness and a necessary boyish touch to the part. Mr. Charles Allan and Mr. Edmund Maurice played small parts in a cast of unusual excellence. Special praise must be reserved for Miss Viola Tree for her charmingly girlish and sympathetic Hester. Miss Tree played very prettily indeed, and it is a pleasure to listen to her voice.

B. L.

## A THEATRICAL REVIVAL.

Oscar Wilde's wonderful play, "A Woman of No Importance," a comedy in epigrams and a tragedy in morals, was to-night revived at His Majesty's Theatre by Mr. Tree before an audience which seemed to include everybody of importance. All the old stagers of first night productions were there, including Sir Squire Bancroft (conspicuous in the stalls by his white locks, black velvet monocle ribbon, and distinguished air), Mr. J. K. Jerome, Mr. L. N. Parker, Mr. Claude Lowther (looking much happier since he gave up politics), Sir W. H. Gilbert, etc., etc. In one of the boxes was a party which included the Duchess of Marlborough. Her Grace thoroughly enjoyed the scintillating satire at the expense of American ways in the first act. The play was finely staged and admirably acted for the most part. That is to say, Mr. Tree as Lord Illingworth and Miss Marion Terry as Mrs. Arbuthnot were excellent. Lady Hunstanton was capitally played by Mrs. Charles Calvert, who made a sweet old optimist of the venerable but still fashionable lady. Miss Viola Tree was rather deplorably out of the picture as Hester Worsley, but she was perhaps a little nervous. As to the play—as incomparably brilliant and biting as ever. It comes out of the cupboard as fresh as paint, even as to its politics. "After all, the House of Commons doesn't do much harm," says Lord Illingworth. "But the House of Lords is so terribly out of touch with popular feeling," ventures someone. "That's what saves us" retorts his Lordship, complacently twirling a charming moustache if Mr. Frank Richardson will permit me to say so. Then take his Lordship's description of the "healthy" English fox-hunting squire—"the unspeakable pursuing the uneatable." Or of the peerage—"the one really good work of fiction the English have produced." Or of women—"the triumph of matter over mind," and "Sphynxs that tell all their secrets." There is only one among us now who can write such dialogue as this, and he might very well have penned Lord Illingworth's view of womankind. "The greatest tyranny in the history of the world. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. The only tyranny that can last," says his Lordship. It seems a pity Wilde had to sacrifice him in the last act on the fireside altars of Philistian Suburbia.

## Bristol Times.

an interest well warranted by the occasion, brought a crowded house to-night to His Majesty's, for Mr. Tree's revival of Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance." Associations many and varied clustered round the revival, memories of players who have long since quitted the stage, and memories especially of the stir created by this, among other examples of the skilled handiwork of a gifted dramatist. The house to-night was kept perpetually on the alert, and frequently convulsed with mirth, by the brilliance of the dialogue, its shrewd sallies, and its daring generalisations. The talk regarding women's place in politics and the controversy of Lords and Commons is singularly appropriate to the present hour. To the usual argument, the ever-ready Lord Illingworth, personified with great spirit by Mr. Tree, replies "We of the House of Lords are not in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilised body." The pathos of the piece loses nothing in the capable hands of Miss Marion Terry, and Mrs. Charles Clavert, as Lady ~~Illingworth~~, and Miss ~~Illingworth~~ Jeffreys share the remaining honours.

Nottingham Guardian

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# Dundee Courier.

At a moment when the London stage is invaded with American plays it is somewhat consoling to note that Mr Tree can still fill His Majesty's Theatre with the work of an English playwright. The consolation is qualified by the necessity of admitting that "A Woman of No Importance" is not the work of a living author. Nevertheless it is a characteristic piece of modern comedy writing by that master of brilliant epigram, the late Mr Oscar Wilde. This evening, to a brilliant audience, the old sparkling satire, subtle wit, and keen insight into human nature appealed with the same force and afforded almost the same pleasure as in the days when Mr Wilde was in the zenith of his power.

I don't think that Lord Illingworth is a part that suits Mr Tree. He failed this evening to represent the cultured roue, afflicted spasmodically with remorse, with quite the artistic perfection which he throws into some of his roles. He, however, was supported by a brilliant caste of actresses to maintain the drawing-room glamour of this particular piece of social satire. Miss Ellis Jefferies, in the feminine counterpart of Mrs Allenby; Miss Butler as Lady Stutfield; and Miss Bishop as Lady Pontefract represented admirably the shallowness, the ennui, the elegance, and bitterness of ladies of social distinction. Into the part of "The Woman of No Importance," who is first ruined by Lord Illingworth, and then robbed of her son by the same person, Miss Marion Terry threw her artistic soul, and scored a well-deserved triumph.

"A WOMAN OF NO  
IMPORTANCE."

REVIVAL IN LONDON.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, Wednesday.

It is nearly 14 years ago that Oscar Wilde's brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance," was first produced by Mr Tree at the Haymarket Theatre, with Mrs Bernard Beere in the leading rôle. Now the part of Mrs Arbuthnot is played, and well played, by Miss Marion Terry, who added another laurel to her crown. Both in the sparkling epigrams and in the touches of deepest pathos she was adequate and satisfying, and throughout the whole of the evening her progress was triumphal. Mr Tree again appeared as Lord Illingworth. Much water has passed under London Bridge since he first essayed the rôle, but time seems to make little difference to Mr Tree, and if his method is a trifle more mature, it is none the worse, and not a line of the play was any the worse for it. He spoke the brilliant phrases put into his mouth as if they were naturally delivered, while in the two strong scenes of the comedy he was excellent. The support accorded the principals was good, and Mrs Calvert as Lady Hunstanton was a tower of strength, while the brilliant Miss Ellis Jeffreys as the volatile Mrs Allenby, Miss Viola Tree as the pure-minded American girl, and Miss Kate Bishop, with Miss Kate Cutler, as the important Lady Caroline Pontefract and the soulful Lady Strutfield, were well placed. The part of Gerald Arbuthnot, the son of Lord Illingworth, and of the "Woman of No Importance," was splendidly played by Mr Charles Quartermaine. The revival was well received, and the company were called again and again at the close of each act.

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# *East Anglian Daily Times.*

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new York Herald (Paris)

## MR. TREE REVIVES WILDE PLAY

[BY THE HERALD'S SPECIAL WIRE.]

LONDON, Thursday.—Oscar Wilde's play "A Woman of no Importance" was revived last night by Mr. Beerbob Tree, being given for the first time in London for fourteen years. The brilliant dialogue of the piece lost none of its attractiveness.

Many younger persons there were apparently surprised to learn that many well-known epigrams had their origin in the play. Sallies referring to manners and customs American were apparently enjoyed by the numerous persons of that nationality who were present. The part of the American girl was played by Miss Viola Tree.

Miss Ellis Jeffreys, who made her first appearance, since her return from America, Monday afternoon, the woman who uttered most of the epigrams, was warmly received.

Manchester Evening News.

### *An Oscar Wilde Revival.*

The revival of Mr. Oscar Wilde's "A Woman of No Importance" by Mr. Tree at His Majesty's Theatre last night received a tremendous reception from a crowded and distinguished audience. Mr. Tree made an ideal Lord Illingworth, and Mr. Chas. Allan, the only other original member of the cast, was seen to advantage as the self-opinionated Mr. Kelvil, M.P. Mrs. Calvert, who replaced the late Miss Rose Leclercq as Lady Hunstanton, was much praised. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as Lady Allenby was delightful, and Miss Marion Terry in the title role played with sincerity and gentle grace.

# *Washington Herald.*

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18  
May  
AN "AGELESS" PLAY.

## Talk with Mr. Tree and Miss Marion Terry.

At His Majesty's Theatre next Wednesday Mr. Tree will revive that brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance."

In an interview yesterday the famous actor-manager vigorously combated a suggestion that the present-day theatregoer might possibly consider the play somewhat old fashioned.

"Emphatically not," he exclaimed, "emphatically not. Personally I am strongly of opinion that this play shows its age less than any play of which I know. It seems to me to have been written before its time, so much so indeed that the world has only just now grown up to it. I consider it more modern, more in touch with the actual spirit of the age than it was when I first produced it in 1893. Why even the suffrage question is touched on.

"Only, of course, the play that is very true can avoid becoming old fashioned—like the Venus of Milo, who is for all time in her nudity, but who, did she don a crinoline, would at once become demodée. The happenings of ten or fifteen years ago are often not so recent, not so 'modern,' or so in touch with us of to-day as 'Cæsar' or 'Cleopatra.' A play of ten years ago will be tremendously old fashioned unless it is written with great truth—which I maintain is the case with the 'Woman of No Importance.'

"Ah! good morning, Miss Terry," broke off Mr. Tree, as Miss Marion Terry, that delightful exponent of the "Woman of No Importance," herself walked upon the stage of His Majesty's, where the actor-manager was going through his morning budget of letters. "Here we are busily wondering how far the 'Woman of No Importance' is in touch with the present day."

"Well, in some respects," replied the lady, "I must confess I think she will appear a little old-fashioned, which would be deplorable in a play which is so brilliant, so witty, so human."

"Exactly," chimed in Mr. Tree, "but do you not see you contradict your own arguments when you speak of its humanity? It is that which saves it from ever being out of date."

"Yes," agreed Miss Terry, "but the speeches are longer than an audience to-day is accustomed to."

"Yes, but they are too brilliant to bore."

"Its pathos is almost too painful at times for utterance," observed Miss Terry.

"Yes," murmured Mr. Tree, "the lines that you have to say yourself, 'leave me in a little walled-in garden and a well of water and the child that God sent me'—those are lines that emphasise the eternal humanity of this play and that rank it indeed with the finest writing of all time."

As to the audience of to-day, Miss Terry was of opinion that they were intellectually an improvement on those who flocked in such crowds to see the "Woman of No Importance" in the early Nineties.

Mr. Tree rather differed from her. "I think they are just the same as they were then," he said, "just as I think the smart people represented in Wilde's play are exactly the same to-day. But there, of course, I may be wrong. One never knows when one ceases to be in touch with the spirit of the moment. Still I have a sort of consciousness, a sort of hope that I retain the growing mind, the mind that keeps pace with the day, which is the one test of modernity—the mind which can see in a great play of this class that quality which Tennyson so admirably attributed to King Arthur's Round Table, that it is a mirror of the age. In Wilde's play we see each other, not dimly as in a Roman mirror, but absolutely face to face."

Birmingham Post. May 23.

An audience in which were many well-known persons gave an enthusiastic reception to the late Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance," on its revival by Mr. Tree at His Majesty's Theatre here to-night. Fourteen years have passed since the piece was produced under the same management at the Haymarket, but the lapse of time has not deprived the witty and paradoxical dialogue of its attractiveness or the story of its interest. Indeed, "A Woman of No Importance" shows no sign of advancing age, and the manner in which it was played was calculated to bring the qualities which won it popularity in the past well to the fore. Mr. Tree appeared again in his original part as the worldly Lord Illingworth, and repeated his former success; and Miss Marion Terry gave a winning impersonation of Mrs. Arbuthnot, the long-suffering victim of Lord Illingworth's unfaithfulness. As Gerald Arbuthnot, Mr. Charles Quartermaine acted with skill and force, and the elderly Lady Hunstanton of Mrs. Charles Calvert was a wonderfully clever and delightful character. Miss Ellis Jeffreys acted cleverly as Mrs. Allenby, and as Hester Worsley Miss Viola Tree gave an impersonation not lacking in naïveté and grace. Played as it was to-night, the piece is assured of a cordial welcome during its present run.

Yorkshire Post. May 23

A crowded house assembled at His Majesty's Theatre to-night to witness Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of no Importance." It is thirteen years since its sparkling dialogue first attracted delighted audiences to the Haymarket Theatre, Mr. Tree's former home across the way, but the old lines went to-night as if they were dropping from his lips for the first time, the truth which underlies the worldly cynicism of the author's epigram being keenly appreciated by the fashionable gathering. Mr. Tree's impersonation of Lord Illingworth was a masterpiece of perfectly natural acting. The brilliant bons mots which fell to his share were uttered with an introspective and delicate hesitancy which gave the spectator the idea that he was listening to a famous wit staking his reputation on the bright flashes of after-dinner inspiration. Miss Marion Terry was warmly welcomed as Mrs. Arbuthnot, and played with exquisite emotion as the mother of Lord Illingworth's son. Mrs. Charles Calvert was perfectly delightful as the dry and humorous Lady Hunstanton, and Miss Ellis Jeffreys gave many artistic touches to the part of Mrs. Allenby. The revival was a most successful one, and is decidedly one of the most striking attractions of the present season.

For the sake of modern drama it is satisfactory to know that the time has come when "A Woman Of No Importance" can again be produced on the English stage. A fashionable and appreciative audience crowded every part of His Majesty's Theatre to-night to witness Mr. Tree's revival of Oscar Wilde's most brilliant social drama. For wit and satire it has few equals in modern productions, and the epigrams in the first act alone would provide wit and wisdom enough for a dozen of the average comedies of the day. The fourteen years that have passed since Mr. Tree first produced the play at the Haymarket, judging from to-night's reception of it, has not changed public appreciation of its wit or sentiment, and the best test of its merits lies in the fact that it is as fresh and as true as ever. The sallies present in crystallised form the topics that are ventilated in all seriousness to-day. The democracy, the aristocracy, the House of Lords (which "not being in touch with the people makes them a civilised body"), the people's undue devotion to sport and pleasure, even the suffragists—all were butts for the wags of the day of "The Woman Of No Importance," as they are to-day, and according to Father Bernard Vaughan the "Smart Set" is not better than that pilloried by the author. If manners and habits, thoughts, and conversation change not, sentiment and passion certainly do not, and the cynical rake Lord Illingworth, the noble ill-used Mrs. Arbuthnot, and the flippant Mrs. Allenby are with us yet.

We have had heaps of dramas upon the theme upon which "A Woman of No Importance" is based, but none of recent date. It is the old story of a man of the world who betrayed a trusting woman and deserted her. Twenty years later he chances to meet mother and son again, and yearns, as much as his cold cynical heart can yearn, to have his son, but not the mother with him. As Lord Illingworth, we have Mr. Tree once more in the character of a man of society, and he acts with an air of graceful ease and dignity. Lord Illingworth is the product of an artificial society, who treats morality as a subject of jest, who has learnt the secret of entertaining his "set" and a great many other secrets which he discloses in brilliant epigrams. In the first act Mr. Tree's cynicism, born in intellectual boredom, is given with striking naivety, and in the stronger parts the restraint to which he has schooled himself becomes impressive. It is a magnificent piece of characterisation, and Mr. Tree may be congratulated on having achieved a further great triumph.

Miss Marion Terry, as the injured woman, plays with strong emotion in the scenes between her betrayer and her son. The love she bears for her boy, the sacrifices she makes for him, displayed true womanliness, and her acting is superb. Miss Viola Tree played the part of the American, Hester Worsley, the one innocent, pure, and Christian girl in a "Smart Set." Miss Tree grows in beauty and advances in histrionic skill, and in her lecture to the women of Society, and in the comfort she brings to Mrs. Arbuthnot, she was dignified as well as emotional. Mrs. Charles Calvert, as the forgetful "Lady Hunstanton," was exceedingly amusing; and Miss Ellis Jeffreys was perfect as Mrs. Allenby. The company has been well  
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 the play is magnificently staged.

Dublin Express. May 23.

An interest well warranted by the occasion brought a crowded house to-night at His Majesty's for Mr. Tree's revival of the brilliant play, "A Woman of No Importance." The house was kept perpetually on the alert, and frequently convulsed with mirth, by the brilliance of the dialogue, its shrewd sallies, its daring generalisations, its talk regarding women's place in politics, and of the controversy of Lords and Commons, is singularly appropriate to the present hour. To the usual argument, the ever-ready Lord Illingworth, personified with great spirit by Mr. Tree, replies: "We of the House of Lords are not in touch with public opinion that makes us a civilised body." The pathos of the piece loses nothing in the capable hands of Miss Marion Terry and Mrs. Charles Clavert as Lady Hunstanton. Miss Viola Tree and Miss Eliza Jenneys share the remaining honours."

Scotsman. May 23.

At His Majesty's Theatre this evening Mr Tree revived his old success, "A Woman of No Importance." It is some fourteen years since Oscar Wilde's play was seen in London, though in the provinces it has not been unknown, and it is remarkable how well the author's verbal fireworks stand the test of time. The real heart of the play is in its epigrams and its witty discussions of things in general, in which the author got deeper than mere surface epigram, and touched upon things which are tragic in their truth. Mr Tree, as the epigrammatist-in-chief, is repeating his old part, and though a little uncertain at times carries the thing through with an air of distinction. Mrs Charles Calvert's old Lady Hunstanton, who thinks him so incomprehensible and so clever and never remembers anything correctly about anything, is absolutely delightful, and Miss Ellis Jeffreys' study of the frivolous Mrs Allenby is a perfect piece of finished comedy. One person alone refrains from saying witty things, and confines herself to advancing the plot. This is Miss Marion Terry, whose sweetness and charm are seen at their best in the part of Mrs Arbuthnot, the injured mother. There are also clever performances by Mr Edmund Maurice, Miss Kate Cutler, and Miss Viola Tree. The revival was received with genuine enthusiasm.

Newcastle Chronicle May 24.

#### A FINE PERFORMANCE.

Whatever else may be said about the late Oscar Wilde there can be no denying his ability as a playwright. He used to expose society vices on the stage just as some of our daring preachers do it in the pulpit, and if his language was occasionally too suggestive it was almost atoned for by the brilliance of his wit. After an interval of 14 years Mr. Tree has just revived "A Woman of No Importance." It cannot be called the author's best play, and yet there is a boldness about the humour, as well as a brightness of dialogue, that makes the work of many rival dramatists look extremely poor. Though irresistible ripples of laughter followed the cynical sayings of these fashionable worldlings there was no lack of sympathy for the puritanically disposed American girl who upbraided them. It would be difficult to see a finer cast, indeed, than now appears at His Majesty's Theatre. Mr. Tree plays the unenviable role of Lord Illingworth with undoubted ability, while Miss Ellen Jeffreys, Miss Marion Terry and Mrs. Charles Calvert render him admirable assistance. Artistically considered the lawn at Hunstanton does equal credit to a fine revival.

# Glasgow Evening Times.

## WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

May 24.

### A Theatrical Revival.

Wilde's wonderful play, "A Woman of No Importance," a comedy in epigrams and tragedy in morals, was last night revived at Majesty's Theatre, London, by Mr Tree to an audience which seemed to include everybody of importance. All the old stage-actors of the night productions were there, including Squaire Bancroft (conspicuous in the stalls in his white locks, black velvet monocle ribbon and distinguished air), Mr J. K. Jerome, Mr N. Parker, Mr Claude Lowther (looking much happier since he gave up politics), Sir H. Gilbert, etc., etc. In one of the boxes a party which included the Duchess of Devonshire. Her Grace thoroughly enjoyed the scintillating satire at the expense of American ways in the first act. The play was finely acted and admirably acted for the most part. It is to say, Mr Tree as "Lord Illingworth" and Miss Marion Terry as "Mrs. Arbuthnot" were excellent. "Lady Huntington" was capitably played by Mrs Charles Davenport who made a sweet old optimist of the most admirable but still fashionable lady. Miss Tree was rather out of the picture as "Hester Worsley," but she was perhaps a little nervous. As to the play—as incomparable brilliant and biting as ever. It comes out of the cupboard as fresh as paint, and as pertinent as politics.

## Evening

# THE

## OSCAR

### On Woman.

Woman resembles a riddle.

There are two kinds—

—plain and colourless.

The only way to

make love to her

is to love someone else if she

A girl with a

*St. James's Express. May 24.*

It is just over fourteen years since Mr. Tree produced "A Woman of No Importance" at the market Theatre. Yet the play wears wonderfully well, and it had an enthusiastic welcome on its revival at His Majesty's Theatre to-night. That warm welcome was well-deserved, for the piece is good drama in every sense, and, apart from its poignant story, its cleverness of characterisation and the brilliance of its dramatic work, puts to shame much of the pretentious theatrical work of to-day. Mr. Tree has done well to reproduce Oscar Wilde's clever play—one that is pathetic as well as witty—and I hope that financial success will reward his artistic endeavour. Now, as originally, Mr. Tree acts Lord Illingworth, one of his finest embodiments of character. But there is a new Mrs. Arbuthnot in Miss Marion Terry, who rarely has never acted more exquisitely. The impersonation is fraught with tenderness and charm. In the great scene at the end of the third act, in which the mother informs her son that the callous man of the world is his father, Miss Terry played finely and beautifully. Mr. Tree has spared no pains in securing a splendid cast, and it is no exaggeration to state that Mrs. Charles Calvert, Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Miss Kate Bishop, Miss Viola Tree, Miss Kate Cutler, Mr. Fisher White, Mr. Edmund Maurice and Mr. Charles Quartermaine could not be bettered. As a piece of this description is too small—in a theatrical sense—for so spacious a stage as that of His Majesty's, Mr. Tree has erected an elaborate gilt frame behind the proscenium, and thereby the effect of a comparatively small stage. It is a capital idea and one that is wonderfully effective.

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Glasgow Evening Times  
May 24. 1907

The revival of Oscar Wilde's comedy "A Woman of No Importance" attracted a very fashionable and interesting gathering to His Majesty's the other 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. Among other well-known people who were to be seen in the stalls or boxes were the Marquis de Soveral, the Portuguese Minister; Mr Claude Lowther, M.P.; Mr Plowden, with the quizzical air characteristic of him in his role as judicial humorist; Sir Hiram Maxim, who came without a gyroscope; Miss Irene Vanbrugh, and her husband, Mr Dion Boucicault; Miss Miriam Clements, and other popular favourites of the stage.

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# THE MASTER OF EPIGRAM and HIS DISCIPLE.



## OSCAR WILDE.

### On Woman.

Woman resembles the Sphinx, without a riddle.

There are two kinds of women in society—plain and coloured.

The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain.

A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature like Gwendoline could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

Twenty years of romance makes a woman a ruin; after twenty years of married life she resembles a public building.

Always kiss women who talk seriously; it's such a tremendous surprise to them.

I prefer women with a past. They're always so amusing to talk to.

### On Man.

Hopper's one of Nature's gentlemen, the worst type of gentleman I know.

Men are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and horribly conceited when they are bad.

Men become old, but they never become good.

How hard good women are! How weak bad men are!

Married men nowadays act like bachelors, and bachelors like married men.

### On Marriage.

It is a curious thing about the game of marriage—a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all the honours, and invariably lose the odd trick.

I look upon my husband as a promissory note which I am tired of meeting.

Thirty-five. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should either know everything or nothing.

I might be married to her, she treats me with such indifference.

Good heavens! How marriage ruins a man! It's as demoralising as cigarettes, and far more expensive.

There's nothing in the world like the devotion of a married woman—it's a thing no married man knows anything about.

London is full of women who trust their husbands. You can always recognise them. They look so thoroughly unhappy.

### On Being Good or Bad.

If you pretend to be good the world takes you very seriously; if you pretend to be bad they don't.

Saints generally have a past, and sinners sometimes a future.

Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of their moral responsibility.

Repentance is out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes her.

### On Life.

The Book of Life began in a garden—and ended in Revelations.

What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.

Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.

We live, as I hope you know, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines.

I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen.

### On Truth.

The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.

Untruthful! My nephew Algernon! Impossible! He's an Oxonian.

Nowadays to be intelligible is to be found out.

### On Things in General.

The peerage is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done.

Extravagance is the luxury of the poor.

He talks, but has no conversation.

The House of Lords is never in touch with public opinion; that is what keeps it civilised.

Oh, don't be moderate; nothing succeeds like excess.

What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure.

Epigrams are in the air. Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman" is to be revived next week at the Court Theatre. At His Majesty's Mr. Tree is again producing Oscar Wilde's "A Woman of No Importance."

Oscar Wilde was undoubtedly the most brilliant epigrammist of his generation, just as Bernard Shaw at the present time is the most gifted utterer of clever phrases. Has Mr. Shaw modelled himself on Oscar Wilde and improved on the model?

Possibly one may be able to judge from the excerpts from their plays, which are here shown.

## BERNARD SHAW.

### On Woman.

The unwomanly women who work for their living and know how to take care of themselves never give any trouble.

You build a ship proof against the best gun known; somebody makes a better gun and sinks your ship. You build a heavier ship, proof against that gun; somebody makes a heavier gun and sinks you again. And so on. Well, the duel of sex is just like that.

### On Man.

Of all the thousand qualities a man may have, the only one you will find as certainly in the youngest drummer boy in my army as in me, is fear. It is fear that makes men fight; it is indifference that makes them run away; fear is the mainspring of war.

The English are a race apart. No Englishman is too low to have scruples; no Englishman is high enough to be free from their tyranny. But every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world.

You can always tell an old soldier by the inside of his holsters and cartridge boxes. The young ones carry pistols and cartridges; the old ones, grub.

You know what soldiers are, General; they will have men of family for their officers. A subaltern must be a gentleman, because he's so much in contact with the men. But a general, or even a colonel, may be any sort of riff-raff if he understands the shop well enough. A lieutenant is a gentleman; all the rest is chance.

Man can climb to the highest summits, but he cannot remain there long.

### On Marriage.

Get married to a good woman. That'll give you a foretaste of what will be best in the Kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth.

You regarded marriage as a degrading bargain, by which a woman sells herself to a man for the social status of a wife and the right to be supported and pensioned in old age out of his income. That's the advanced view—our view.

Well, in plain prose, I loved her so exquisitely that I wanted nothing more than the happiness of being in such love.

We all go about longing for love; it is the first need of our natures, the first prayer of our hearts; but we dare not utter our longing; we are too shy.

### On Being Good or Bad.

There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle.

Whether the behaviour of your younger children amounts to legal molestation is a question on which it may be necessary to take counsel's opinion.

I'm only a beer teetotaller, not a champagne teetotaller. I don't like beer.

Wicked people means people who have no love; therefore they have no shame. They have the power to ask love because they don't need it; they have the power to offer it because they have none to give.

If you lived in London, where the whole system is one of false good-fellowship, and you may know a man for twenty years without finding out that he hates you like poison, you would soon have your eyes opened. There we do unkind things in a kind way; we say bitter things in a sweet voice; we always give our friends chloroform when we tear them to pieces.

There are three sorts of people in the world, the low people, the middle people, and the high people. The low people and the high people are alike in one thing; they have no scruples, no morality. The low are beneath morality, the high above it.

The test of a man or woman's breeding is how they behave in a quarrel. Anybody can behave well when things are going smoothly.

I will show you twenty thousand cowards who will risk death every day for the price of a glass of brandy.

Never make a hero of a philanderer.

We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than we have to consume wealth without producing it.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

Revival of the drama by Oscar Wilde at His Majesty's Theatre on May 22.

- 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. Altonby ..... Miss ELLIS JEFFREYS
- Hester Worsley ..... Miss VIOLA TREE
- Alice ..... Miss HILDA MOORE
- Mrs. Arbuthnot ..... Miss MARION TERRY

Revolutions are always interesting. Every theatrical entertainment more or less "dates"; and it is curious to note how time tries dramatic work, as it tries all art products. The fourteen years or so which have elapsed since *A Woman of No Importance* was produced at the Haymarket Theatre have put the author's talent through a sieve, and separated the wheat from the chaff. The really brilliant wit, the happy and genuine humour of the play are as effective as ever; the parts of it which were merely transient affectations—the mechanical paradoxes, the assumption of superior wickedness, and the audacious silliness, are instinctively rejected by audiences who are not influenced by a vanished "vogue." It says a great deal for the real merits of the piece that, now that the fashion of which it was an example has passed away, it stands so well the test of reproduction.

The illegitimate son, his position, rights, and duties, constitute the theme of the piece. Lord Illingworth, a *blase* roue with a fine flow of epigram, has seduced, in time past, a certain Mrs. Arbuthnot, and Gerald Arbuthnot is the result of the liaison. Gerald, who has a place in a bank, is staying with his mother at Hunstanton Chase, the country seat of Lady Hunstanton, an amiable dowager. Mrs. Arbuthnot is opposed to any friendship between her son and Illingworth; but the latter has taken a fancy to the young man, and attempts to "form" him on his—Illingworth's—own model. A lively married woman, Mrs. Altonby, has "dared" Illingworth to kiss Miss Hester Worsley, a young American girl of pure instincts, with whom Gerald is in love. When Illingworth, in defiance of Mrs. Altonby's opinion, embraces the young lady against her will, she screams out. Gerald comes to her assistance, and is about to attack Illingworth when Mrs. Arbuthnot interposes with the cry, "He is your father!"

The question is discussed in the last act, "Ought a seduced woman, years after her fall, to obtain or accept an offer of marriage from her betrayer?" Gerald is of opinion that his father should be forced to marry his mother; but Mrs. Arbuthnot takes a less conventional and more elevated view.

The clever little comedian attached to the three handbooks, in their musical comedy act, is the "barker," who has been a regular feature of the fair since the days of the "barker." One of the most interesting of the "barkers" is the "barker" who has been a regular feature of the fair since the days of the "barker." One of the most interesting of the "barkers" is the "barker" who has been a regular feature of the fair since the days of the "barker."

THE REVIVAL OF THE DRAMA. The revival of the drama by Oscar Wilde at His Majesty's Theatre on May 22. The play is a masterpiece of wit and humor, and is a perfect example of the author's talent. The production is excellent, and the acting is superb. The play is a masterpiece of wit and humor, and is a perfect example of the author's talent. The production is excellent, and the acting is superb.

Weekly Sun, May 25.

Beerbohm Tree, Revivalist.

"A Woman of No Importance" is "a play of decreasing importance." All plays age; this play in a certain sense was never young. It has been discovered since his death by persons who should know better that the author of this still sparkling piece of work was not a wit, but only an imitator of wits. Shaw, I grant, is a greater wit than Wilde was; just as Wilde was greater than his more libidinous models. But, when folks tell me that Wilde's wit was "merely machine-made" I am inclined to ask them why they nor anyone else never took hold of the machine before Wilde and worked it to equally brilliant ends. If the cynics say that Wilde's impromptus in private life were carefully prepared and that you can see his stage jokes coming, I would retort that we live in a vain world of carefully-prepared impromptus and that it is easy to anticipate a stage joke's second coming when one has heard it already. That was the case with all Wilde's wit and all Whistler's humour before the cleverer men in bars and clubs and newspapers began to patronise them. It was not the wit but the inhumanity of Wilde that marred his greatness as a dramatist. The philosopher's stone of popular sympathy was never his until after his downfall. Then, for the first time, he became emotionally fit to write a fine play on such a theme as "A Woman of No Importance"; but mentally he had become unfit. Wilde's earlier Socialism was a picturesque mental pose as the pretty dress and the sunflowers were picturesque physical poses. To parody the French saying, Wilde strode about the earth in a spirit that said: "What matters if I impress them!" Mr. Shaw says his hobby is "showing off"; until he had eaten of bitterness and drunk the dregs, Wilde did nothing else but "show off." One verse of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" contains more strong feeling than all the plays of Wilde.

"A Woman of No Importance."

Yet "A Woman of No Importance," now revived at His Majesty's, is very welcome for a variety of reasons. It is historically interesting as recalling the best that Wilde could do in semi-serious vein; as reminding us that this was the finest thing to be seen in the London theatres fourteen years ago. Mr. Tree seems to think that "A Woman of No Importance" remains an "advanced" play. Frankly, it does not; in circles where thought is general, the sex views of Hester Worsley were already out of date when Wilde uttered them in the theatre: the theatre which intellectually is always (and necessarily) twenty years behind the moral pioneers, the mass of playgoers being at least twenty-five years behind the theatre. Many of the latter will find "A Woman of No Importance" starting as their elder sisters and brothers did when they were younger. But these affrighted souls will have been living the sheltered life; they will not have read the things that matter, even in the daily Press. Perhaps whilst my own morals are still perceptibly developing I am growing old-fashioned in some other ways. For I find from the articles of some of the other critics that I ought to have been bored by the banalities of Wilde, his feeble attempts to be funny, his jokes (as one says) "really not much elevated above the pun"; whereas I enjoyed the play thoroughly. There is one witticism in "A Woman of No Importance" that has never been rivaled by any other witticism I have heard or read in any land or language; there are half-a-dozen that no one but Wilde could have written. These do not make a great play, but they give added savour to a fairly good one.

Splendid Acting.

The usual Tree company—Constance Collier, Lyn Harding, Basil Gill, etc.—are now at Drury Lane. But the newcomers to Mr. Tree's banner (or the recidivists) play superbly. On the lighter side, Miss Ellis Jeffreys stands with only Miss Marie Tempest in the very front rank of English actresses; on the serious side, how many can compare with Miss Marion Terry. Miss Tree, of course, has a very long way to go yet before she is a first-class actress, but in the rôle of Hester she shows real progress; and Mr. Tree's Illingworth, though not the sort of part quite in which he shines most, is distinguished and effective. Also Mr. Edmund Maurice's cleric and Mrs. Calvert's Lady Hunstanton are excellent. I fancy the public will go to see "A Woman of No Importance" and be amused by it. Anyhow, I am very glad that it was revived.

Northern Whig, May 25, 1907.

THE NATION.

May 25, 1907.]

The Drama.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

HERE was a curious sensation in witnessing Oscar Wilde's play at His Majesty's Theatre on Wednesday night after an interval of fourteen years. The mind had retained certain of the aphorisms and epigrams which once seemed to be cut with such trained skill. "Nothing succeeds like excess," "Americans are wonderfully clever at concealing their talents," "he must be quite respectable as one has not heard his name before," "women represent the triumph of matter over the coloured," and "a duty is what one expects of others, but what one does oneself," seemed wonderfully subtle fourteen years ago. They sounded a new note in the theatre. Since then there has been a fashion in epigrams, and fashion is killed them. Besides, Mr. Bernard Shaw's circle of Ethiopian epigrammatists are really more witty than Oscar Wilde's, and, by comparison, they are quite human. It was pleasant, however, to hear the whizzing of these verbal fireworks once again, although most of them seemed a trifle limp and ineffective. They were what one remembered best of Oscar Wilde's play. The serious interest of "A Woman of No Importance" was precisely the quality of the play one did not remember. Is it possible that we accepted this superficial melodrama as a play which can bear serious criticism? Did we think these theatrical situations were a contribution to drama?

After all, you must not expect more from a dramatist than he is. Oscar Wilde had an Irishman's wit. In addition, he had a certain artistic sensuousness which served him as the stead of feeling. With it went a facility for writing which would have made literature had there been thought behind it. From these qualities a dramatist cannot be manufactured. He must possess the imagination which creates character, and, above all, he must have the sympathy with life that shall enable him to see beneath its surface. That sympathy should be passionate, and there is no error more prevalent than the idea of the dramatist's detached impartiality. Every play mirrors at least part of its author's nature. The more complex the dramatist's character the more faithfully does he reflect the many facets of distance. Oscar Wilde was not complex. His attitude towards the world was that of sensuous curiosity, and it will be found to be the basis of all his plays, from "A Woman of No Importance," with its attempt at an ethical outlook, to "Salome," with its frank sensuousness. He understood the world he lived in, but his vision was circumscribed indeed. "A Woman of No Importance" he managed to convey the atmosphere of fashionable life of the period. The smaller characters are fairly typical, and one at least—Lady Hunstanton—is actually alive. Her gracious vagueness, her tolerant lapses of memory, and her sudden flashes of shrewd sense make her quite a creation. She does not utter the heartless, hard, brilliant sayings of the other characters, but is always kind and unintentionally witty. There is human nature in Lady Hunstanton, but none in any of the other characters. That would not have mattered had Oscar Wilde been content with a superficial comedy, such as "The Importance of Being Earnest," but his main theme is one which becomes quite inexplicable if the protagonists lack character.

His Lord Illingworth, for instance, is the mouthpiece for Oscar Wilde-isms, and that is all we really know of him. The play tells us that he betrayed and abandoned a young girl, leaving her to her fate with a child. Twenty years afterwards he meets her by chance, and, suddenly discovering that the one thing necessary to his life is paternity, proposes to keep his son by his side as private secretary. Lord Illingworth's attitude towards Mrs. Arbuthnot, as she calls herself, is inexplicable. He apparently expects her to treat his dastard conduct as an episode that has passed. It is conceivable that a man might wish that, but surely he would not ask the mother to give up their son, and certainly he would not go about the matter in a spirit of flaunting and cynical philosophy. Least of all would he taunt her in the end with having been his mistress. Lord Illingworth is

Abolition Free Press, May 25, 1907.

The revival of "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's is interesting rather than fascinating, for the play has distinctly lost since it was reproduced fourteen years ago. One now understands how its epigrams were turned out, but what is much more disconcerting is its inherent sense of corruption—a point of view quite independent of our knowledge of its author's fate. Lord Illingworth was always a shocking cad, but that quality dominates us more clearly to-day because our attention is not diverted by the glitter of the wit. Mr. Tree has added several players to his company, for the work needs a different quality of acting from his Shakespearean repertoire. A brilliant success has been achieved by Mrs. Calvert as the witty old peeress, who almost alone of the puppets has decent instincts. Miss Ellis Jeffreys is another welcome addition. It would seem as if Mr. Tree proposed playing modern work, for he has introduced into the enormous proscenium opening a temporary frame which reduces the stage space in a way suited to modern comedy.

The Drama.

"A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

supposed to be a gentleman of birth and breeding, and Mrs. Arbuthnot was not a chance woman in his life. Oscar Wilde went to lurid, crude melodrama for this character. Lord Illingworth is merely an old-fashioned Adelphi villain stuccoed over with Oscar Wilde-isms. The creature is incredible.

In the same way Mrs. Arbuthnot is copied from the ill-used heroines of melodrama. She dresses in black, and has suffered and is still suffering. Yet she tells her son, in a parable, that his father was a bad man. Did Oscar Wilde really think that a woman who knows her lover to have been inconceivably base, and has not seen him for twenty years, still suffers from the thought of her "sin" and from having been deserted? Why, her main thought for all those years must have been a heartfelt thankfulness that he had gone out of her life, and that she had borne him no other children. When she finds that her son has been appointed private secretary to his father there could not have been a question of the course any woman but a heroine of cheap melodrama would take. Whatever happened she would fight to the last to prevent the father having possession of the son, even if she had to tell her boy the truth. Lord Illingworth's "you have educated him to be your judge" will not bear a moment's thought. An obvious retort is suggested. Oscar Wilde was a clever man, and he endeavoured to overcome this difficulty by arbitrary devices. He invented an American girl of Puritan ideals who preaches the necessity of atonement for sin, with the modification that both man and woman should receive equal punishment, and this girl is in love with the son, who, in his turn, makes his mother understand that she will be judged by the narrow ideals of conduct in which she herself has educated him. Such a situation is possible, or would appear possible if we knew anything for certain of Mrs. Arbuthnot's character. She would have to be drawn as a narrow-minded woman of no clear outlook on life, and one can imagine that fear of being judged by a son might possibly allow such a mother to be privy to his coming under the influence of a bad father. Mrs. Arbuthnot would then have been a poor-spirited coward whose selfish fear quenched every spark of moral feeling, or of any genuine feeling at all, and the play would have fallen to the ground. Oscar Wilde shirked the difficulty by the cheap expedient of an accident. Illingworth, with the incredible caddishness which characterises him throughout, kisses the American Puritan out of pure bravado, and she complains to his son, her lover. There is a scene. "I'll kill him," shrieks the boy. "Stop, Gerald," interposes the mother; "he's your father." Oscar Wilde must have borrowed this from melodrama with his tongue in his cheek. Indeed, the whole play, with the exception of Lady Hunstanton and, to some extent, of the picture of the superficial aspects of a certain kind of English life, is poor, tawdry melodrama. When it is not brilliant in a hard, inhuman fashion it is compact of false sentiment, poor characterisation, and inappropriate rhetoric. The stage in London must have been in a bad way before we could have accepted so clumsy a piece of stage carpentry.

Possibly the play had a certain vogue on account of its style. Superficial as its psychology is, there is no question that the author did handle his situations with something of literary distinction. It is not the literature of a dramatist, because the writing is too often conditioned for the sake of rhetorical effect. Thus Oscar Wilde made his Mrs. Arbuthnot speak pure literary images at a moment of great emotional tension. They are not the images which would naturally spring from that tension, for they are too far-fetched, and are put into her mouth merely for the sake of colour. In his treatment of dramatic scenes Oscar Wilde was singularly futile and verbose. His characters never say the inevitable thing. Could any speech ring less true than the long tirade of the American girl against the evils of English society? Or, to go deeper into drama, would it be possible to make Mrs. Arbuthnot less of a character than she is? Oscar Wilde meant her to have a passionate hate of the mean sensualist who had ruined her early life, and an actress must look on that feeling as the key-note of the character. Yet she has never anything to say that adequately expresses that hate. Oscar Wilde was not a dramatist of imagination. Mr. Beerbohm Tree has done well to revive this play, if it be only to prove to us that fourteen years have seen a great change in our dramatic art, and in our attitude towards it.

