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Oscar Wilde  
Scrapbook

Vol. 9

THEATRES.

[May 25, 1907.]

"A Woman of No Importance."

Oscar Wilde's wit was good wit, for it still sparkles, and laugh follows laugh at His Majesty's in the scenes of the play in which the characters sit down and talk epigrams. The close of the third act, when the young man of the play learns that the libertine whom he threatens is his father, is finely dramatic, and Miss Marion Terry and Mr. Quartermaine, on whom the weight of this scene fell, played it finely. Miss Terry is quite admirable as Mrs. Arbuthnot, Mrs. Charles Calvert is excellent as the old-fashioned Lady Hunstanton, and Miss Ellis Jeffereys could not be improved upon as the very worldly Mrs. Allenby. Miss Kate Cutler has little to do except to listen to what other people say, and she does this charmingly. Miss Viola Tree plays the American girl with charm and sincerity. Messrs. Allan and Maurice play two character parts amusingly, but both rather over-act. It is always difficult to judge Mr. Tree on a first night. He seemed to me on Wednesday to be playing too slowly to get the sense of brilliance which there should be about Lord Illingworth. No doubt he will quicken up when the anxieties of the first two or three performances are over. A frame has been placed within the marble opening of the proscenium, thus reducing the height and width of the stage to proportions suitable for modern comedy.

I passed my Whit Sunday and Whit Monday at the Chalet Madcap rejoicing that my rose shrubs have thrown out shoots of wonderful length, and that my rhododendrons are flowering more lavishly than any other rhododendrons in the place. The only domestic event of importance is that Marie and Gustave now keep fowls—they keep them in the washhouse, as a matter of fact—and that one of the hens has hatched out a dozen chickens. These chickens, so I gather, are to be sold by Marie chicken-keeper to Marie housekeeper, and I am to eat Poulet à l'Anglaise at a greatly

reduced rate this summer. The third Le Touquet theatre is now being built. There never was such a settlement for theatres. The first, which used to be a barn, is now used as a temporary church. The second belonged to the little Casino in the forest. The third, now in course of construction, is being added to the Chateau, for that big building, with its great spread of lawn, is in future to be the Casino of the Forest. The old building has been gutted, and an army of workmen are busy building a theatre and two ball rooms, and altering the rooms of the Chateau to make a club privé, reading-rooms, and all other necessary rooms of an up-to-date Casino.

women, beginning with the portrait of her husband is the best portrait of a Puritan gentleman in English literature—and including chapters on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Linleys, the Sheridans, Molly Lepel, the Gunnings, Lady Jersey, and Mrs. Crewe. Mr. Dixon aims at doing something more than giving a series of portraits. Each of his chapters is connected with its predecessor, and he hopes by this means to give a history of English wit and beauty during two centuries.

LORD EVERSLEY, better known as Mr. Shaw Lefevre, one

HIS MAJESTY'S.

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

Wotton, published Peterhouse remarked familiar one, there is much more than which are familiar ful "Lives." Dr. interest in Wotton's rsity Press has in ters of Sir Henry he announcement is he "Relique Wotton real humour. To sador as "an honest his country." Mr. ill contain a number en preserved in the

press a book called "Essays and Addresses," by Sir Richard Jebb. (Cambridge University Press. 10s. 6d. net.) "Schools of Hellas." By Kenneth J. Freeman. (Macmillan. 4s. net.) "An Observer in the Near East." Anonymous. (Eveleigh Nash. 16s.) "The Russian Revolution." By Leo Tolstoy. (Everett. 6d.) "Lord Randolph Churchill." By the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, M.P. (Macmillan. Cheaper Edition, 7s. 6d. net.) "Mr. Poskitt." By J. S. Fletcher. (Eveleigh Nash. 6s.) "Lettres à Madame Viardot." Par Ivan Tourgueneff. (Paris: Fasquelle. 3 fr. 50.) "Jeanne D'Arc devant l'Opinion Allemande." Par Georges Goyau. (Paris: Perrin. 1 fr.) "La Fantôme du bonheur." Par J. De Méstral Combremont. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy. 3 fr. 50.) "Ernst Haeckel—Ein Lebensbild." Von Wilhelm Bolache. (Berlin: Seemann. Mk. 1.)

smen who served in Mr. Gladstone's as made an extremely interesting colures on "The Decline in Number of in Great Britain." The paper has tical Society; but as it throws much uses and remedies of rural depopula hope and expect that it will shortly ured form. Our readers will be glad erversley is making a satisfactory reit which befell him a few days ago at of the most dangerous crossings in

likely to excite more than ordinary be published. Commander Peary's ich Messrs. Hutchinson have almost f the author's seventh voyage of ex-managed to get farther north than President Roosevelt has written an ame, which will be illustrated by raphs selected from a large number eary.

Lieutenant Boyd Alexander, whose of the Geographical Society a couple at interest. Lieutenant Alexander Niger, by Lake Chad, to the er five thousand miles, which took ish. The expedition, though fatal proved remarkably fortunate in its tenant Alexander has been able ith many of the native tribes, and h light on their habits and customs, sputed points of African geography. d to be very much smaller than has ractically two lakes, with fifteen ble marsh and bush between them. lished by Mr. Edward Arnold about

English editions of the "Chronicle," which Carlyle's "Past and Pre-tal. Sir Edward Clarke having rom "The King's Classics" Series, mmissioned Mr. L. C. Jane to make a new translation from the original Latin. Abbot Gasquet is to contribute an introduction, dealing with monastic life in England in medieval times. In the meantime, Sir Ernest Clarke's version is issued by Mr. Murray, who has also in hand a new and revised edition of the work.

In choosing M. H. M. Barbois on Thursday last to, succeed M. Brunetiere, the French Academy showed itself more anxious to include an eminent lawyer among its mem-bers than to recognise literary merit. M. Barbois was one of the founders of the Society for the Study of Com-parative Legislation, and he is the author of "Discours et Plaidoyers," "L'Affaire du Panama," and two or three other volumes on legal questions.

CANON CHEYNE is to publish, through Messrs. A. and C. Black, at the end of the month, a book on "Traditions and Beliefs of Ancient Israel."

BOOKS TO BE READ.—

"Essays and Addresses." By Sir Richard Jebb. (Cambridge University Press. 10s. 6d. net.) "Schools of Hellas." By Kenneth J. Freeman. (Macmillan. 4s. net.) "An Observer in the Near East." Anonymous. (Eveleigh Nash. 16s.) "The Russian Revolution." By Leo Tolstoy. (Everett. 6d.) "Lord Randolph Churchill." By the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, M.P. (Macmillan. Cheaper Edition, 7s. 6d. net.) "Mr. Poskitt." By J. S. Fletcher. (Eveleigh Nash. 6s.) "Lettres à Madame Viardot." Par Ivan Tourgueneff. (Paris: Fasquelle. 3 fr. 50.) "Jeanne D'Arc devant l'Opinion Allemande." Par Georges Goyau. (Paris: Perrin. 1 fr.) "La Fantôme du bonheur." Par J. De Méstral Combremont. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy. 3 fr. 50.) "Ernst Haeckel—Ein Lebensbild." Von Wilhelm Bolache. (Berlin: Seemann. Mk. 1.)

THEATRES.

HIS MAJESTY'S.

ON Wednesday Mr. Tree revives at His Majesty's Theatre Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance." It is a relief to find that a time has at last come when one may be permitted to say outright that a play is by Oscar Wilde. For a long time if one of his pieces was announced at all it was considered in good taste to omit all mention of the author's name.

OWING to the scandal of Wilde's trial, the interest in his books and plays, so far as England and America were concerned, entirely ceased for the time. There was a Sheriff's sale at his house in Tite Street while he was in prison awaiting his trial, and when he was afterwards made bankrupt his literary and dramatic works were considered of so little value that they were written off as being worth nothing at all! They were not even included in the bankrupt's so-called assets.

ON the 31st of this month there is to be sold at Messrs. Sotheby's an exceedingly rare copy of Wilde's tragedy, "The Duchess of Padua." The history of this play is very interesting. It was written in 1882 for Mary Anderson, and finished in 1883. Much to the author's disappointment it was rejected by that lady. It was, however, produced in New York on November 4, 1891, at Hammerstein's Opera House, with Miss Gale in the title-role. Twenty copies were printed for the use of the company who were rehearsing the piece. Almost all of these perished, as such copies generally do perish, in the hands of actors during the stormy days of rehearsal. One copy, however, was presented by Oscar Wilde to the gentleman who is now his literary executor. The only other copy known to exist is that which is to be sold at Sotheby's on the 31st.

ON April 25, 1895, the day of Oscar Wilde's arrest, the original manuscript of the play was stolen from 16, Tite Street. A few days after he had been committed to Holloway Prison, Wilde wrote to a friend asking him to go to Tite Street and to rescue the MS. of "The Duchess of Padua," together with some others. But the friend was too late. He found that some one, who must have known a great deal about Wilde's writings, had been there already, and had abstracted the unpublished manuscripts, while most of those which had already been published were there intact. From that day to this those manuscripts have never been heard of; so had it not been for the fact that those twenty copies were privately printed in New York "The Duchess of Padua" would have been lost for ever.

IN 1897 Wilde was released from prison, and shortly afterwards produced "The Ballade of Reading Gaol." This roused a renewed interest in his other works, and a number of publishers, both English and American, proceeded to pirate them. In 1900 Wilde died. The interest in his works now revived, especially in Germany. In 1904 Dr. Max Meyerfeld, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Wilde's works, obtained permission from the literary executor to make a translation into German of "The Duchess of Padua."

THE Official Receiver, who had so curiously overlooked the value of Wilde's literary and dramatic works, now bestirred himself, and in 1906 the creditors were paid off twenty shillings in the pound, together with forty per cent. (four per cent. for ten years), and Oscar Wilde's bankruptcy was annulled.

IN Germany Oscar Wilde's writings are valued very highly. He is regarded as one of the English classics, and his works often form the subject of lectures at the German Universities. In America, too, they are greatly admired. It will be interesting to see what price this almost unique copy of "The Duchess of Padua" will fetch at Sotheby's.

"Nothing succeeds like excess" was probably, of all his parodies of trite sayings, the one which pleased its author (Oscar Wilde) the most, and served as the keynote of his conduct, both social and literary. This line occurs in *A Woman of No Importance*, which was revived at His Majesty's Theatre on Wednesday, with every appearance of pleasing the distinguished audience which assembled to witness that particularly brilliant, but somewhat distasteful play. The story is by no means original, and reminds one of the work of Alexandre Dumas fils without that great writer's power; but in his dialogue Oscar Wilde recalls to us Congreve and Sheridan, both of whom at times he runs very close. He was, in fact, essentially an imitator—a very clever imitator certainly; but it is tolerably obvious that he was steeped in Lord Beaconsfield's paradoxical writings, and that, in constructing his plays, he had ever before his eyes the first Act of *The School for Scandal*. *A Woman of No Importance* bristles with wit and paradox; in fact, one is almost surfeited with good things, for paradox succeeds epigram in a quite perplexing fashion. To recall only a few of them: There is the line about marriage being like the Book of Life, which begins with a man and woman in a garden and ends with Revelations; then there is the phrase about women being sphinxes without riddles; extravagance being the luxury of the poor; duty being that which we expect from others (which, by the way, is a mere translation of the phrase *le devoir, c'est ce qu'on exige des autres*), and so on *ad infinitum*. During the greater part of the first Act the characters sit in a row and fire off their witticisms, almost after the fashion of Christy Minstrels, and there is no suggestion of the story of the play until within a few seconds of the fall of the curtain on the first Act. One feels as if one were at a pyrotechnic display. Up goes one rocket, and then another; some extremely brilliant, some slightly disappointing; occasionally there is only a fizzle—the squib is a bit damp. But stay! it will be Lord Illingworth's turn in a minute. Mark well, and listen! Bang! up goes a really fine firework, and the audience half murmurs to itself, "Ah!" Bang again! The same performer has let off yet another, even more brilliantly varied in green and gold and crimson than the last. Of course, the good lines and some very clever character-drawing give great opportunities to the interpreters, and Mr. Tree and the splendid company of comedians who figure in this play all score successes, but perhaps the finest performances of all are the Mrs. Arbuthnot of Miss Marion Terry, and the Mrs. Allenby of Miss Ellis Jeffereys.

It is hard to say whether *A Woman of No Importance* will find as much favour now as it did when originally produced some fourteen years ago, when pungent and paradoxical dialogue was more of a novelty. No doubt it is difficult to write, but Mr. Bernard Shaw has since shown us that others besides the author of *Lady Windermere's Fan* have the gift, and, indeed, on one occasion Mr. Henry Arthur Jones went out of his usual line, possibly in order to demonstrate this fact, and gave us a scene in *The Masqueraders*, in which he came near to equalling Oscar Wilde on that writer's own ground. There is one curious thing about Oscar Wilde's dialogue which seems to have escaped observation; but that is no reason for being silent on the subject. In most of his plays, and especially in the piece now under consideration, he makes his characters habitually address each other by their names—a sure mark of the ill-bred person. Now, as some who figure in *A Woman of No Importance* are in the peerage, and all are members of fashionable society, this extraordinary blunder is quite remarkable, for one does not expect to hear ladies and gentlemen continually repeating each other's names on the stage, after the fashion of a landlady addressing her "paying guests." In fine, *A Woman of No Importance* is a brilliant piece of work, and Mr. Tree has done well to revive it, for the play was an epoch making production, and is as full of cleverness as the traditional egg is supposed to be full of meat. Still, there is about it the atmosphere of a not too pleasant spring morning; the sun is shining with all its brightness, and we feel the warmth of its beams, but then the east wind pierces us to the marrow, and we know that there is something wrong somewhere. In all Oscar Wilde's clever and fascinating work there is ever a note of revolt against what is true and what is noble, and one recalls the query of Faust, "Who art thou?" and the answer, "I am the spirit who denies."

"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. Allonby .....MISS ELLIS JEFFREYS
- Hester Worsley .....MISS VIOLA TREE
- Alice .....MISS HILDA MOORE
- Mrs. Arbuthnot .....MISS MARION TERRY

Revivals 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 sillinesses, 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 blasé *roué* 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 Illington; 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. Allonby, 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. Allonby'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 of the matter, and refuses to become the wife of the man she now utterly detests and despises. Having convinced her son by her arguments, she dismisses him to pursue his love-making with Miss Worsley, and joins issue, alone, with the dissolute peer, who is now anxious that Gerald shall become his private secretary. Mrs. Arbuthnot so enrages Illingworth by her opposition to this project, and by her scornful refusal of his offer of marriage, that he alludes to her as "his cast-off mistress." Mrs. Arbuthnot strikes him across the mouth, and he goes out, abashed, if not ashamed. The epigrams with which the piece is garnished became so famous at the time of its production that some of them—notably the definition of a fox hunt as the "unspeakable riding after the uneatable"—are still remembered; and the pleasant characteristics of the personages—Lady Hunstanton, with her habitual vagueness of reminiscence, Lady Caroline, with her stern, old-fashioned, reprobatory spirit, and her loving tyranny over her meek husband, Hester Worsley with her generous enthusiasm and Quixotic attempts to reform English society, Mr. Kelvil, the self-important M.P., and the Venerable James Daubeny, unctuous, mild, and always amenable, make *A Woman of No Importance* a most agreeable entertainment, apart from its dramatic and ethical interest. The piece, in its fine comedy and knowledge of the society depicted, is superior to anything of its kind which has been produced in London for years past.

Most interesting memories of the acting in the original performance were evoked by the revival. Only two members of the Haymarket cast were available, Mr. Tree and Mr. Charles Allan. At the Haymarket in 1893 Mr. Fred Terry the Mrs. Gerald Arbuthnot, Mrs. Bernard Beere the Mrs. Arbuthnot, Miss Rose Leclercq the Lady Hunstanton, Miss Le Thiere the Lady Caroline Pontefract, and Miss Julia Neilson the Hester Worsley. Mr. Tree's style has ripened and matured since *A Woman of No Importance* was produced, and the air of leisured ease and cynical calmness with which he played Lord Illingworth in 1893 is even more perfectly polished and perfected. From first to last, he presents a finished picture of the luxurious libertine, the easy, indifferent observer, the ready wit, and the imperturbable man of the world. It is hardly necessary to say that in the stronger passages of the part Mr. Tree is absolutely and entirely convincing and impressive. Miss Marion Terry is not only intensely dramatic and deeply expressive as Mrs. Arbuthnot; her irresistible charm, her bewitching sweetness and delicate sincerity, win warm sympathy for the unfortunate woman, the pathos of whose position Miss Terry fully emphasises. Miss Viola Tree is a delightful representative of Hester Worsley as far as appearance and personal gifts go, and does full justice to the young American's spirited attacks on English immorality. Mrs. Charles Calvert gives quite an original reading of the rôle of Lady Hunstanton, endowing the character with a flavour of quaint individuality and making all the points of the part with accomplished skill. Miss Ellis Jeffreys is the acme of attractiveness as Mrs. Allonby and gives a performance of the part which is sparkling, vivacious, and archly humorous. That excellent actress, Miss Kate Bishop, is quite at ease in the rôle of the severely sententious Lady Caroline Pontefract, and delivers that lady's authoritative utterances with admirable repose. Mr. J. Fisher White supplies a neat little character-sketch as Sir John Pontefract; Mr. Langhorne Burton displays decided talent in a quietly clever impersonation of Lord Alfred Rufford, and Mr. Charles Allan's Mr. Kelvil is as comical and natural as ever. Mr. Edmund Maurice is unimpeachable in every way as the Ven. James Daubeny, the part originally sustained by Mr. Kemble. Mr. Clive Currie is thoroughly efficient as Farquhar; and Mr. F. Cowley Wright is careful and commendable as Francis. Miss Kate Cutler contributes a deliciously ingenuous performance as the "sweet simpleton," Lady Stutfield, and Miss Hilda Moore does useful work well as the maid Alice. The play is mounted in the splendid style which we always expect at His Majesty's. Mr. Tree, on the original production of the piece, said at the end of the evening, "I am proud of being connected with this work of art." At the close of the revival on Wednesday, being summoned before the curtain, he briefly expressed his gratification at the favourable reception given to the play.

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**Bearbohm 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 no 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 rivalled 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. Any-

I am very glad that it was revived.

May 28 1907

# Northern Whig

Mr. Tree's revival of "A Woman of no Importance" at His Majesty's Theatre promises to be a success. Some critics say that the brilliant dialogue falls flat, but I did not find it so, neither did the large and enthusiastic audience, who laughed and applauded most heartily. Seated in front of a man coughing incessantly and loud, and behind a lady with a coiffure forming as effective a screen as a large frying-pan, I still passed a most enjoyable evening. So many of the remarks have become historical that the remark applied to

Hamlet that it "would be a good play if there were not so many quotations in it" might perhaps be applied to this piece. But the clever paradoxical dialogue went as brightly as possible in spite of the fact that most of us had heard much of it quoted over and over again. Mr. Tree has done his utmost to produce "A Woman of no Importance" in first-class style. Each member of the company is perfect in his or her part. Mr. Tree as the unprincipled Lord Illingworth presents the character in all its hard cynical immorality, and Miss Marion Terry as Mrs. Arbuthnot in the name part plays with sweet womanly pathos and a dash of rage or scorn which the unworthy libertine richly deserves. Mr. Charles Quartermaine as the son was excellent, and Mrs. Charles Calvert in her inimitable style was perhaps the most popular of all the artists. Miss Viola Tree as the romantic high-principled idealistic American girl played most sympathetically and looked extremely handsome. Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Miss Kate Cutler, and Miss Kate Bishop were so good that one wished they had more to do, and the make up and amusing acting of Mr. Fisher White as the henpecked Sir John Pontefract and Mr. Edmund Mairice as Archdeacon Daubeny deserved all praise. By the way, the Archdeacon is a cruel burlesque, as are most of the clergy of the Church of England on the stage, and I wonder why Anglicans take no offence at this when no manager dare put a Roman Catholic clergyman on the boards except as a model of all the virtues. In my last letter I spoke of what was expected of the dresses in this play. They are the most beautiful on the London stage at the moment. It is not that they are specially gorgeous, but that there is an elegant chic about each, and all which is

On the report of the money resolution in connection with the Small Landholders (Scotland) Bill, providing for the salaries and expenses of the Land Court and Agricultural Commissioners, Mr. RAWLINSON complained that the House was asked to draw a blank cheque. He therefore moved an amendment fixing the salaries of the Agricultural Commissioners at £3,000. Sir F. BANBURY seconded. Mr. SINCLAIR (Secretary for Scotland) reported that the object of the resolution was merely to enable the Standing Committee to

## Small Landholders (Scotland) Bill.

On the motion of the PRIME MINISTER, the eleven o'clock rule was suspended for the purpose of discussing the Small Holdings and Allotments Bill.

## Eleven o'clock Rule Suspended.

The PRIME MINISTER said that the business for this week would be—On Tuesday, Ordinary Business; on Wednesday, Scotch supply; and on Friday, the Criminal Appeal Bill.

May 25. 1908

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 Shakespearian 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 purposed 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

## 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 renned skill. "Nothing succeeds like excess," "Americans are wonderfully clever at concealing their intents," "he must be quite respectable as one has not heard his name before," "women represent the triumph of matter over mind," "there are only two kinds of women—the plain and the coloured," and "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 has 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 does 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 in 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 existence. 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. In "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

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.

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

Oscar Wilde's wit was good wit, for it still sparkles, and laugh follows laugh at His Majesty's in the scenes of the play in which the characters sit down and talk epigrams. The close of the third act, when the young man of the play learns that the libertine whom he threatens is his father, is finely dramatic, and Miss Marion Terry and Mr. Quartermaine, on whom the weight of this scene fell, played it finely. Miss Terry is quite admirable as Mrs. Arbuthnot, Mrs. Charles Calvert is excellent as the old-fashioned Lady Hunstanton, and Miss Ellis Jeffereys could not be improved upon as the very worldly Mrs. Allenby. Miss Kate Cutler has little to do except to listen to what other people say, and she does this charmingly. Miss Viola Tree plays the American girl with charm and sincerity. Messrs. Allan and Maurice play two character parts amusingly, but both rather over-act. It is always difficult to judge Mr. Tree on a first night. He seemed to me on Wednesday to be playing too slowly to get the sense of brilliance which there should be about Lord Illingworth. No doubt he will quicken up when the anxieties of the first two or three performances are over. A frame has been placed within the marble opening of the proscenium, thus reducing the height and width of the stage to proportions suitable for modern comedy.

I passed my Whit Sunday and Whit Monday at the Chalet Madcap rejoicing that my rose shrubs have thrown out shoots of wonderful length, and that my rhododendrons are flowering more lavishly than any other rhododendrons in the place. The only domestic event of importance is that Marie and Gustave now keep fowls—they keep them in the washhouse, as a matter of fact—and that one of the hens has hatched out a dozen chickens. These chickens, so I gather, are to be sold by Marie chicken-keeper to Marie housekeeper, and I am to eat Poulet à l'Anglaise at a greatly

reduced rate this summer. The third Le Touquet theatre is now being built. There never was such a settlement for theatres. The first, which used to be a barn, is now used as a temporary church. The second belonged to the little Casino in the forest. The third, now in course of construction, is being added to the Chateau, for that big building, with its great spread of lawn, is in future to be the Casino of the Forest. The old building has been gutted, and an army of workmen are busy building a theatre and two ball rooms, and altering the rooms of the Chateau to make a club privé, reading-rooms, and all other necessary rooms of an up-to-date Casino.

women, beginning with my  
husband is the best portrait of a Puritan

May 25. 1907

# CIVIL SERVICE GAZETTE.

## THEATRES.

### HIS MAJESTY'S.

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

wit which will bear repetition in the study. However, the piece is certain to be a huge success. [Jiscen 1201603 U16 v218 Library](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/infocentre/faq16) alone should command it.

a new translation from th  
is to contribute an intr

Planet May 25

ON Wednesday Mr. Tree revives at His Majesty's Theatre Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance." It is a relief to find that a time has at last come when one may be permitted to say outright that a play is by Oscar Wilde. For a long time if one of his pieces was announced at all it was considered in good taste to omit all mention of the author's name.

OWING to the scandal of Wilde's trial, the interest in his books and plays, so far as England and America were concerned, entirely ceased for the time. There was a Sheriff's sale at his house in Tite Street while he was in prison awaiting his trial, and when he was afterwards made bankrupt his literary and dramatic works were considered of so little value that they were written off as being worth nothing at all! They were not even included in the bankrupt's so-called assets.

ON the 31st of this month there is to be sold at Messrs. Sotheby's an exceedingly rare copy of Wilde's tragedy, "The Duchess of Padua." The history of this play is very interesting. It was written in 1882 for Mary Anderson, and finished in 1883. Much to the author's disappointment it was rejected by that lady. It was, however, produced in New York on November 4, 1891, at Hammerstein's Opera House, with Miss Gale in the title-rôle. Twenty copies were printed for the use of the company who were rehearsing the piece. Almost all of these perished, as such copies generally do perish, in the hands of actors during the stormy days of rehearsal. One copy, however, was presented by Oscar Wilde to the gentleman who is now his literary executor. The only other copy known to exist is that which is to be sold at Sotheby's on the 31st.

ON April 25, 1895, the day of Oscar Wilde's arrest, the original manuscript of the play was stolen from 16, Tite Street. A few days after he had been committed to Holloway Prison, Wilde wrote to a friend asking him to go to Tite Street and to rescue the MS. of "The Duchess of Padua," together with some others. But the friend was too late. He found that some one, who must have known a great deal about Wilde's writings, had been there already, and had abstracted the unpublished manuscripts, while most of those which had already been published were there intact. From that day to this those manuscripts have never been heard of; so had it not been for the fact that those twenty copies were privately printed in New York "The Duchess of Padua" would have been lost for ever.

IN 1897 Wilde was released from prison, and shortly afterwards produced "The Ballade of Reading Gaol." This roused a renewed interest in his other works, and a number of publishers, both English and American, proceeded to pirate them. In 1900 Wilde died. The interest in his works now revived, especially in Germany. In 1904 Dr. Max Meyerfeld, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Wilde's works, obtained permission from the literary executor to make a translation into German of "The Duchess of Padua."

THE Official Receiver, who had so curiously overlooked the value of Wilde's literary and dramatic works, now bestirred himself, and in 1906 the creditors were paid off twenty shillings in the pound, together with forty per cent. (four per cent. for ten years), and Oscar Wilde's bankruptcy was annulled.

IN Germany Oscar Wilde's writings are valued very highly. He is regarded as one of the English classics, and his works often form the subject of lectures at the German Universities. In America, too, they are greatly admired. It will be interesting to see what price this almost unique copy of "The Duchess of Padua" will fetch at Sotheby's.

## THEATRES.

## HIS MAJESTY'S.

"Nothing succeeds like excess" was probably, of all his parodies of trite sayings, the one which pleased its author (Oscar Wilde) the most, and served as the keynote of his conduct, both social and literary. This line occurs in *A Woman of No Importance*, which was revived at His Majesty's Theatre on Wednesday, with every appearance of pleasing the distinguished audience which assembled to witness that particularly brilliant, but somewhat distasteful play. The story is by no means original, and reminds one of the work of Alexandre Dumas fils without that great writer's power; but in his dialogue Oscar Wilde recalls to us Congreve and Sheridan, both of whom at times he runs very close. He was, in fact, essentially an imitator—a very clever imitator certainly; but it is tolerably obvious that he was steeped in Lord Beaconsfield's paradoxical writings, and that, in constructing his plays, he had ever before his eyes the first Act of *The School for Scandal*. *A Woman of No Importance* bristles with wit and paradox; in fact, one is almost surfeited with good things, for paradox succeeds epigram in a quite perplexing fashion. To recall only a few of them: There is the line about marriage being like the Book of Life, which begins with a man and woman in a garden and ends with Revelations; then there is the phrase about women being sphinxes without riddles; extravagance being the luxury of the poor; duty being that which we expect from others (which, by the way, is a mere translation of the phrase *le devoir, c'est ce qu'on exige des autres*), and so on *ad infinitum*. During the greater part of the first Act the characters sit in a row and fire off their witticisms, almost after the fashion of Christy Minstrels, and there is no suggestion of the story of the play until within a few seconds of the fall of the curtain on the first Act. One feels as if one were at a pyrotechnic display. Up goes one rocket, and then another; some extremely brilliant, some slightly disappointing; occasionally there is only a fizzle—the squib is a bit damp. But stay! it will be Lord Illingworth's turn in a minute. Mark well, and listen! Bang! up goes a really fine firework, and the audience half murmurs to itself, "Ah!" Bang again! The same performer has let off yet another, even more brilliantly varied in green and gold and crimson than the last. Of course, the good lines and some very clever character-drawing give great opportunities to the interpreters, and Mr. Tree and the splendid company of comedians who figure in this play all score successes, but perhaps the finest performances of all are the Mrs. Arbuthnot of Miss Marion Terry, and the Mrs. Allenby of Miss Ellis Jeffreys.

It is hard to say whether *A Woman of No Importance* will find as much favour now as it did when originally produced some fourteen years ago, when pungent and paradoxical dialogue was more of a novelty. No doubt it is difficult to write, but Mr. Bernard Shaw has since shown us that others besides the author of *Lady Windermere's Fan* have the gift, and, indeed, on one occasion Mr. Henry Arthur Jones went out of his usual line, possibly in order to demonstrate this fact, and gave us a scene in *The Masqueraders*, in which he came near to equalling Oscar Wilde on that writer's own ground. There is one curious thing about Oscar Wilde's dialogue which seems to have escaped observation; but that is no reason for being silent on the subject. In most of his plays, and especially in the piece now under consideration, he makes his characters habitually address each other by their names—a sure mark of the ill-bred person. Now, as some who figure in *A Woman of No Importance* are in the peerage, and all are members of fashionable society, this extraordinary blunder is quite remarkable, for one does not expect to hear ladies and gentlemen continually repeating each other's names on the stage, after the fashion of a landlady addressing her "paying guests." In fine, *A Woman of No Importance* is a brilliant piece of work, and Mr. Tree has done well to revive it, for the play was an epoch-making production, and is as full of cleverness as the traditional egg is supposed to be full of meat. Still, there is about it the atmosphere of a not too pleasant spring morning; the sun is shining with all its brightness, and we feel the warmth of its beams, but then the east wind pierces us to the marrow, and we know that there is something wrong somewhere. In all Oscar Wilde's clever and fascinating work there is ever a note of revolt against what is true and good. "Who art thou?" and the answer, "I am the spirit who denies."

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

To those of us who have maintained that the plays of Oscar Wilde were sure in time to find a foremost place in the English theatre, the revival, after fourteen years, of A Woman of No Importance at His Majesty's, with all the guarantees of excellence which the name of that house carries with it, is not so gratifying as it might seem.

Of course the performance was interesting. Mr. Tree played, as he did fourteen years ago, the bad Lord Illingworth, who has to say nearly all the brilliant things, and the air of natural hesitation with which he produced his epigrams was full of art.

Citizen, May 26.

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

After having been allowed to remain for fourteen years in the shadows, Oscar Wilde's brilliant comedy, or shall we say comedy-drama, appeared once more before us last Wednesday, proving to be just as witty, as refreshing, and as vital as of old, and full credit be to Mr. Beerbohm Tree for having revived it.

"SALOME" IN VIENNA.

[From "The Tribune" Correspondent.] VIENNA, May 25th.

After many vicissitudes consequent upon the refusal of the Lord Chamberlain to allow the production of the opera owing to the Biblical character of its subject matter, "Salomé," composed by Herr Strauss on the text of Oscar Wilde, was produced last night on the stage of the Deutsches Volkstheater.

John Jones, May 25

At His Majesty's Theatre a brilliant comedy, "A Woman of No Importance," was revived. It is nearly 14 years ago since Mr. Tree first produced this play at the Haymarket Theatre, with Mrs. Bernard Beere in the principal rôle.

Publisher & Bookseller, May 25

CORRESPONDENCE.

[The Editor wishes it to be clearly understood that, whilst he is pleased to insert letters upon all subjects of interest to readers, he cannot be held responsible for any of the opinions ventilated by correspondents.]

CONCERNING J. K. HUYSMANS.

SIR,—Your interesting little wreath of words laid upon the grave of Huysmans reminds readers once more of that writer's really amazing book, "A Rebours."

It should have been what is generally termed, in the cant of the pen, "epoch-making." It was not. France, or Paris rather, was too deep in the sordid, horrid slough of naturalism to notice such work greatly.

The book would be hard to translate, but Arthur Symonds tried his hand at some of it in the Fortnightly about ten years ago, and a famous living American, Mr. Chatfield-Taylor, put some of its pages and phrases into English in his brilliant novel, "Two Women and a Fool."

Bookmen should love it for its glowing account of modern and mid-age writers; I mean its critical studies of the volumes in the library of Des Essientes, its protagonist. "A Rebours" was a literary victory almost of the very highest kind that is possible.

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

People, May 26.

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

The real test of the lasting power of a play is its reception on revival. Put to proof last week in this way by Mr. Tree, "A Woman of No Importance," though greeted with unqualified acceptance, failed for all that to inspire the electrical effect that produced when its cynical platitudes first burst upon the town 14 years ago.

What claim to truth, not to say wit, is there in epigrams such as these: "Men are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and horribly conceited when they are bad." "There are two kinds of women in society—plain and coloured."

It was noteworthy how the laughter at these and such like mechanical gibes, though loud at first, slackened at their iteration. This result was due probably to the heartless cynicism of the epigrams, which, having no relation to the plot, altogether block its progress through at least two out of the three hours the piece holds the stage.

Mr. Tree plays his original part of the aristocratic libertine with such personal distinction as seems to half mask its depravity. Still, the question forces itself upon the spectator whether the callous selfishness of the villain is consistent with his sudden affection for his son, and the offer of atonement to the mother. Upon the part of the mother Miss Marion Terry brings to bear her wonderful accumulation of womanly tenderness; but, however beautiful in itself, is not this a mistaken reading of the part? Not pathetic solicitude, but indignant scorn, is the emotion, according to the text, the avenged lady should exhibit to her wronger; and it was in this way that Mrs. Bernard Beere interpreted the character.

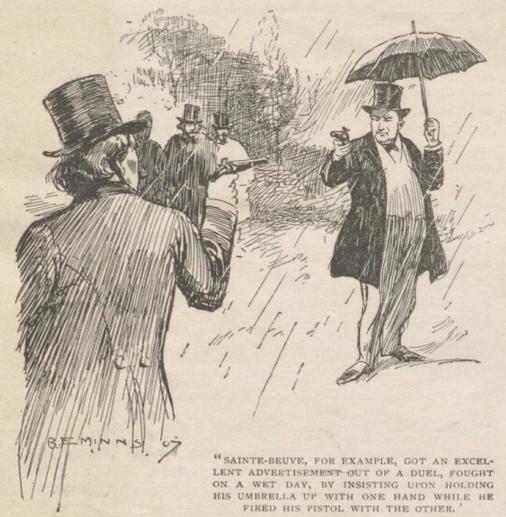
Tribune

The Comedy of Literary Log-Rolling.

By FRANCIS GRIBBLE.

HERE is an American story of an author who began his literary career by falling out of a second-floor window. He was so fat that he bounced up and down two or three times, an indiarubber ball, and then rose and ed upstairs. The incident got into the papers, and created so much interest that shers who had previously fought shy of now besieged his doors, bidding against other for his manuscripts.

Sometimes those eccentricities of an author who began his literary career by falling out of a tragic car; and it is a little less that the most startling of the morbid desire literary notoriety come the Colonies, where the fions of open-air life in w land are commonly ed to promote a healthy of mind. The only who ever jumped into water of a volcano in to draw the attention callous public to his eted poetical works was ew Zealand; and it also a New Zealander committed a murder in to give the world a icent motive for reading omic treatise. He written a pamphlet on evils of Chinese cheap ar, and it had fallen orn from the press. reviews had been dis-



"SAINTE-BEUVE, FOR EXAMPLE, GOT AN EXCELLENT ADVERTISEMENT OUT OF A DUEL, FOUGHT ON A WET DAY, BY INSISTING UPON HOLDING HIS UMBRELLA UP WITH ONE HAND WHILE HE FIRED HIS PISTOL WITH THE OTHER."

when they are bad." The story, one admits, is such as could be found in any melodrama, but the acting lifts it out of the rut. Mr. Tree, as the cynical Lord Illingworth, is at his ease equally in epigrammatic or blood-curdling moments. The scene wherein this fine specimen of nobility coolly offers marriage to the woman he wronged many years back goes with a rare swing, and when he receives in response that contemptuous blow in the face one can trace the thrill of emotion running through the audience. Miss Marion Terry takes much of the pathetic side of his lady, but it is Mr. Charles Quartermaine, as Gerald, the son (without a father, who is so fine, here is something very vigorous and truthful in the impersonation. Mrs. Charles Calvert is a dear garrulous lady to the life, and Miss Viola Tree makes a brave effort to be natural and interesting as Hester Worsley, and Miss Kate Bishop and Miss Kate Celer do much to dignify smaller rôles.

It is true, but he has projecting teeth like a rabbit, and a revolting kind of brown squash-hat, like a passe bowler. He looks gloomy, as if he had just come from Reading Gaol. The fact that he has just taken his crew to the bottom does not, I think, justify his wearing that "De profundis" attitude. I am sure he has a secret sorrow, and I am dying to know it. If we could only confide our woes in one another! As it is, I am very fond of him, but I think on the whole that I would rather not meet him. So many illusions might be shattered.

Then I have an inanimate friend. The G.E.R. Co. always sends a light engine from Ely to Cambridge about three o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot say why. The more usual practice among district superintendents is to make the engine help another train along, even though the proper engine is perfectly competent to pull the train alone. But not so the G.E.R. authorities.

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

The engine ambles along in solitary state. The time never varies, and railway enthusiasts may be interested to know that the engine is always either a "Claud Hamilton" or a 2-4-0 rebuilt with a bogie. Excuse shop, gentle reader. I was once stroking a pair, and in a fit of abstraction I tried to take the time from the coupling rods of my old friend. No, we were not drowned that time. I can't say why I like that engine. I suppose it is because it is so lonely. I know that if the G.E.R. discontinued to run it I should feel I had a real grievance.

Then there is my friend the reporter. He has whiskers. Shade of Frank Richardson! He rides a singularly old-fashioned bike, and looks dull. I feel sure he is a dissenter. I do not mean to imply that dissenters are dull; I have a great respect for all save the pugacious dissenters. But he has the dissenter face and the dissenter mind. When I used to do the rowing notes for this paper, I rode along the bank with him following the University boat, and we got into conversation. I am sorry to say I used to stuff him up badly about rowing, and tell him the wrong times, and so on. If Mr. Jones came down to see the boat, I used to say it was Mr. Brown. Then I bought his beastly paper and read:—"The crew were accompanied by a number of old Blues, including Mr. J. Brown..." I feel sorry I did it now, and often want to tell him how sorry I am. I still meet him on the tow-path, and he looks at me with a reproachful sadness, as a dog does if you beat him more than he thinks he deserves. The pathetic part of it all is that his life must be so dull. Generation after generation of undergraduates goes by, and still he rides that old bike, and writes his article after tea. I wish I could get him a post on this paper, just to brighten his lot a little, but I do not know the editors well enough yet, I fear.

Then there is the parson. He has blue eyes and whiskers. Shades of F. R.! He is the living image of a farmer, and I think that constant contact with that class of men has made him resemble them facially. He is accompanied by a dog—a collie. His lot is not so hard as the reporter's, or as many country parsons'. He must, I think, be vicar of some parish near Baitsbite—Ditton, perhaps—so he can easily get to Cambridge and be in contact with culture. He is not isolated, like many country parsons. Still, I feel we ought to know one another.

I have a few more river friends, but I cannot spare the time to tell you about them.

R. H.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

To those of us who have maintained that the plays of Oscar Wilde were sure in time to find a foremost place in the English theatre, the revival, after fourteen years, of A Woman of No Importance at His Majesty's, with all the guarantees of excellence which the name of that house carries with it, is not so gratifying as it might seem. The truth is that Wilde had attempted here a kind of play quite foreign to his talent, which, supreme in light comedy and farce, exposed all the defects of its qualities when he made the perverse attempt to write a play with a strongly conventional tragedy of passion as its motive. The passages between Illingworth and the woman he had deserted and forgotten twenty years ago, their struggle for the son who does not know his father's name, the emotions of the hour when the son learns their secret, and the way in which the situation is saved, with the good people assured of happiness and the villain foiled, all are of such stuff as the author could only have produced with a smile at the humour of his own hypocrisy. He did not believe in the unnecessary sorrows and weaknesses and stupidities of domestic melodrama; and the mixture of these with a large quantity of the admirable nonsense and penetrating wit which his soul loved has not a very pleasant effect upon the palate. It is a pity that this particular play should have been selected by Mr. Tree from the few that the author left us.

Of course the performance was interesting. Mr. Tree played, as he did fourteen years ago, the bad Lord Illingworth, who has to say nearly all the brilliant things, and the air of natural hesitation with which he produced his epigrams was full of art. But the character as a character is not satisfying; for instance, the final outburst which earns him a blow in the face from Mrs. Arbuthnot could only have come from the heart of a genuine and unspoiled cad, which one has not hitherto suspected him of being. Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton was as good as she could be, and Miss Marion Terry, as mother and as suffering woman, touched everyone at the heart. Miss Viola Tree may have seemed colourless and a little ridiculous as Hester Worsley, the American ingénue who points out the sinfulness and folly of its ways to the smart set. I can only say that she was exactly like that kind of American ingénue down to the least detail—even to her delicate accent. OWEN STAIR.

Citizen, May 25.

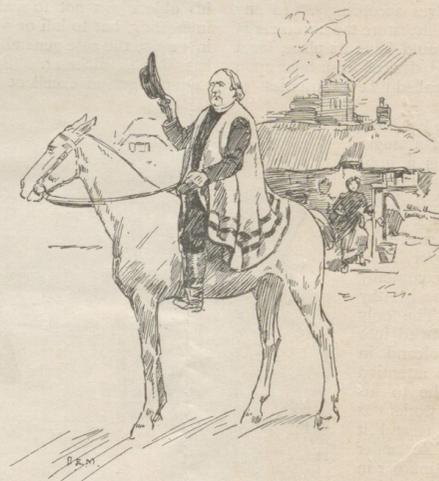
REVIVAL OF "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" AT HIS MAJESTY'S.

After having been allowed to remain for fourteen years in the shadows, Oscar Wilde's brilliant comedy, or shall we say comedy-drama, appeared once more before us last Wednesday, proving to be just as witty, as refreshing, and as vital as of old, and full credit be to Mr. Beerbohm Tree for having revived it. The work is a play mostly of dialogue, which is mostly composed of brilliant epigrams, and the whole is unquestionably the work of a genius. Its further acquaintance now afforded us shows how much some modern authors and playwrights owe to its author, if not in the quality of their work, at any rate for the methods and style they employ. Many of the epigrams ring true, many ring false, and others weary the brain to follow, unless one is diligently on the look-out for them. It is pleasant to hear again—"The Book of Life began with Adam and Eve in a garden and ended in Revelations." "Extravagance is the luxury of the rich; economy the luxury of the poor; America was discovered many times before Columbus discovered it, but the discovery was always undoubtedly in good hands. The characters in the comedy have not been very truly drawn, and Mr. Tree's company gave just the necessary restrained acting required in order not to accentuate the author's mistakes in this respect. The actor-manager gave a very fine rendering of his old part of Lord Illingworth, and Miss Marion Terry could not have been surpassed in her beautiful representation of the part of Mrs. Arbuthnot. Mr. Charles Quartermaine and Miss Ellis Jeffreys both acted with much distinction. Mr. Edmund Maurice gave a very clever study of the part of the Rector of Wrookley. Miss Viola Tree displayed much sincerity and force as the American girl, Hester Worsley. The opportunity should not be missed of paying a visit to His Majesty's Theatre and making further acquaintance with one of a series of brilliant comedies, which includes "Lady Windermere's Fan" in its ranks—a series, too, which unfortunately is only too short, considering the talents of their author.

of a duel, fought on a wet day, by insisting upon holding his umbrella up with one hand while he fired his pistol with the other. He was willing, he courageously said, to take the risk of being shot; but he must be excused from taking the greater risk of catching cold. The duel which Benjamin Constant, who suffered from gout, fought, sitting in a Bath chair, may have been of somewhat similar character. Honour in that case was declared to be satisfied when the Bath chair was hit. A more recent case is that of a minor novelist who wrote a minor novel in which he libelled the Navy. He let it be known that he was not only ready, but anxious, to give "satisfaction" to any naval officer who considered himself aggrieved; and quite a number of naval officers—a simple-minded folk—were drawn. There was a duel every morning for a week or two, until at last the novelist retired hurt; and the novel enjoyed a brisk sale in consequence.

Eccentricity of dress and personal appearance is another device by which many authors have made themselves interesting. The case of Oscar Wilde, in his knee-breeches and velvet jacket, with a jewelled brooch in his long hair, is probably the best remembered; but there have been plenty of others. Disraeli, as all the world knows, draped his waistcoat with gold chains, and affected green trousers, and wore rings outside his gloves. M. Paul Bourget, now a model of elegant correctitude, also wore green trousers in the days when he dwelt in the Latin Quarter.

Parson Hawker, the Cornish poet, is even better remembered for the eccentricity of his garb than for his poetry, though he was a great poet. He rode about his parish in a poncho—which is just a blanket with



"PARSON HAWKER RODE ABOUT HIS PARISH IN A PONCHO."

holes cut in it for the arms; his cassock all the colours of the rainbow; he attended his first wife's funeral in a pink hat with a brim; he was seen in the streets of provincial towns in a crimson jersey and woollen boots. People naturally came to the conclusion that it might really be worth while to look at the poetry of a poet who had a singular taste in dress.

George Sand's early popularity also probably owed something to her habit of going about the streets of Paris in male attire—hussar jacket, trousers, and a felt hat; the songs of Aristide Bruant—the songs of Yvette Guilbert used to sing in her days—first gained an audience because the composer was never seen in any costume but that of a Californian gold-digger. The point could be further illustrated by temporary English examples. There is William Le Queux's ambassadorial habit—instance—a piece of head-gear which seldom out of sight for long, and is invariably associated in the public mind with stories of mystery and crime. The also—but personal remark had better be kept within reasonable limits.

Eccentric behaviour, natural or eccentric, dress; and probably the more of Paris than where else in the world. I give one him and one eccentricity. The illustration of Gérard Nerval, who noted the strange habits of his pets, and sometimes in public leading a dog by a string.

"Lobsters," said the poet, "neither bite, and, besides, they know the sea." The humble example is the unknown poet who, having to find a horse for his poetry, became a costermonger.

Beine interpreted the character. Mrs. Calvert acts with a fine sense of natural humour the part of a garrulously sharp-tongued lady of society; and Miss Ellis Jeffreys justifies the cordial welcome she received on her return from New York by her elegant and high-bred impersonation of a leader of fashion. As an American ingénue, Miss Viola Tree acted with ingenuous grace, and the Misses Kate Cutler and Kate Bishop were of advantage to the cast in secondary parts. The natural son found a fitting exponent of his youthful impetuosity in Mr. Quartermaine, and Messrs. Fisher White, Chas. Allan, and Edmund Maurice individualized the lesser personages of the play with just comedy accomplishment.

Bookmen should love it for its glowing account of modern and mid-age writers; I mean its critical studies of the volumes in the library of Des Essintes, its protagonist. "A Rebour's" was a literary victory almost of the very highest kind that is possible. Where is a translation of it?

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

Academy May 25

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

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

MY RIVER FRIENDS.

IT is quite possible, psychologists tell us, to be on terms of intimate friendship with people, or even things, which one has never had any communication with. It is not impossible to fall in love with the heroine of a novel, or to confide your most intimate thoughts and aspirations to the hero and the villain. So it will not come as a shock when I say that I have my friends on the banks of the River Cam.

Firstly, there is Oscar Wilde. Why do I call him Oscar Wilde? I cannot say, for the life of me. He bears no resemblance in any respect to that playwright. And here again psychology comes in. If a novelist says her heroine is "petite and aethereal," it does not follow that I think of her as such. And if her name is Susan, I picture her as large and lumbering. Nor does the description of the hero's study interest me. I skip it, and he ponders over his love affairs in a room I know very well. So it is with Oscar Wilde. The usual coach is very like every other coach. He is tall and strong, and undergraduatish, and dressed in a blazer, and rides a bike. Oscar is different. He rides a bike, it is true, but he has projecting teeth like a rabbit, and a revolting kind of brown squash-hat, like a passe bowler. He looks gloomy, as if he had just come from Reading Gaol. The fact that he has just taken his crew to the bottom does not, I think, justify his wearing that "De profundis" attitude. I am sure he has a secret sorrow, and I am dying to know it. If we could only confide our woes in one another! As it is, I am very fond of him, but I think on the whole that I would rather not meet him. So many illusions might be shattered.

Then I have an inanimate friend. The G.E.R. Co. always sends a light engine from Ely to Cambridge about three o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot say why. The more usual practice among district superintendents is to make the engine help another train along, even though the proper engine is perfectly competent to pull the train alone. But not so the G.E.R. authorities.

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

The engine ambles along in solitary state. The time never varies, and railway enthusiasts may be interested to know that the engine is always either a "Claud Hamilton" or a 2-4-0 rebuilt with a bogie. Excuse shop, gentle reader. I was once stroking a pair, and in a fit of abstraction I tried to take the time from the coupling rods of my old friend. No, we were not drowned that time. I can't say why I like that engine. I suppose it is because it is so lonely. I know that if the G.E.R. discontinued to run it I should feel I had a real grievance.

Then there is my friend the reporter. He has whiskers. Shade of Frank Richardson! He rides a singularly old-fashioned bike, and looks dull. I feel sure he is a dissenter. I do not mean to imply that dissenters are dull; I have a great respect for all save the pugnacious dissenters. But he has the dissenter face and the dissenter mind. When I used to do the rowing notes for this paper, I rode along the bank with him following the University boat, and we got into conversation. I am sorry to say I used to stuff him up badly about rowing, and tell him the wrong times, and so on. If Mr. Jones came down to see the boat, I used to say it was Mr. Brown. Then I bought his beastly paper and read:—"The crew were accompanied by a number of old Blues, including Mr. J. Brown..." I feel sorry I did it now, and often want to tell him how sorry I am. I still meet him on the tow-path, and he looks at me with a reproachful sadness, as a dog does if you beat him more than he thinks he deserves. The pathetic part of it all is that his life must be so dull. Generation after generation of undergraduates goes by, and still he rides that old bike, and writes his article after tea. I wish I could get him a post on this paper, just to brighten his lot a little, but I do not know the editors well enough yet, I fear.

Then there is the parson. He has blue eyes and whiskers. Shades of F. R.! He is the living image of a farmer, and I think that constant contact with that class of men has made him resemble them facially. He is accompanied by a dog—a collie. His lot is not so hard as the reporter's, or as many country parsons'. He must, I think, be vicar of some parish near Baitsbite—Ditton, perhaps—so he can easily get to Cambridge and be in contact with culture. He is not isolated, like many country parsons. Still, I feel we ought to know one another.

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R. H.

## A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

To those of us who have maintained that the plays of Oscar Wilde were sure in time to find a foremost place in the English theatre, the revival, after fourteen years, of *A Woman of No Importance* at His Majesty's, with all the guarantees of excellence which the name of that house carries with it, is not so gratifying as it might seem. The truth is that Wilde had attempted here a kind of play quite foreign to his talent, which, supreme in light comedy and farce, exposed all the defects of its qualities when he made the perverse attempt to write a play with a strongly conventional tragedy of passion as its motive. The passages between Illingworth and the woman he had deserted and forgotten twenty years ago, their struggle for the son who does not know his father's name, the emotions of the hour when the son learns their secret, and the way in which the situation is saved, with the good people assured of happiness and the villain foiled, all are of such stuff as the author could only have produced with a smile at the humour of his own hypocrisy. He did not believe in the unnecessary sorrows and weaknesses and stupidities of domestic melodrama; and the mixture of these with a large quantity of the admirable nonsense and penetrating wit which his soul loved has not a very pleasant effect upon the palate. It is a pity that this particular play should have been selected by Mr. Tree from the few that the author left us.

Of course the performance was interesting. Mr. Tree played, as he did fourteen years ago, the bad Lord Illingworth, who has to say nearly all the brilliant things, and the air of natural hesitation with which he produced his epigrams was full of art. But the character as a character is not satisfying; for instance, the final outburst which earns him a blow in the face from Mrs. Arbuthnot could only have come from the heart of a genuine and unspoiled cad, which one has not hitherto suspected him of being. Mrs. Charles Calvert as Lady Hunstanton was as good as she could be, and Miss Marion Terry, as mother and as suffering woman, touched everyone at the heart. Miss Viola Tree may have seemed colourless and a little ridiculous as Hester Worsley, the American *ingénue* who points out the sinfulness and folly of its ways to the smart set. I can only say that she was exactly like that kind of American *ingénue* down to the least detail—even to her delicate accent. OWEN STAIR.

27 May

# "SALOME" IN VIENNA.

[From "The Tribune" Correspondent.]

VIENNA, May 25th.

After many vicissitudes consequent upon the refusal of the Lord Chamberlain to allow the production of the opera owing to the Biblical character of its subject matter, "Salomé," composed by Herr Strauss on the text of Oscar Wilde, was produced last night on the stage of the Deutsches Volkstheater. The success of the opera was signal. The critics unanimously recognize the enormous talent of the composer, and point out the perfect harmony between his and the poet's restless genius. What they deplore is the intensely gloomy tone of the whole play. Even the Catholic Press cannot help recognizing that the contrast between licence and morality has been worked out in a masterly fashion. The laurels for acting have undoubtedly been earned by Frau Vorhank, who in the title-part has sung and performed the famous dance superbly.

Tribune

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*Irish Times. May 25*

At His Majesty's Theatre to-night was  
brilliant comedy, "A Woman of no Im-  
portance," was revived. It is nearly 14  
years ago since Mr. Tree first produced  
this play at the Haymarket Theatre, with  
Mrs. Bernard Beere in the principal rôle.  
Miss Marion Terry now plays Mrs.  
Arbuthnot, the leading rôle, and delighted  
her admirers by the brilliancy and power  
of her acting. Mr Tree as Lord Illing-  
worth, if a trifle more matured in his  
style, was extremely good, and played with  
great skill and resource in the two strong  
scenes of the comedy. The play does not  
show signs of age, and though its cor-  
ruscations of wit have lost their newness,  
they are nevertheless very bright and  
sparkling still. The reception was of the  
warmest nature, and at the end of each act  
the whole company was called before the  
curtain. Miss Terry, who with Mr. Tree  
with Mr. Tree received quite an ovation  
at the close of the play.

People, May 26

## HIS MAJESTY'S.

### "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE."

The real test of the lasting power of a play is its reception on revival. Put to proof last week in this way by Mr. Tree, "A Woman of No Importance," though greeted with unqualified acceptance, failed for all that to inspire the electrical effect produced when its cynical platitudes first burst upon the town 14 years ago. The brilliant wit with which the comedy was then credited may sparkle, but is no longer seen to scintillate, startling one as it does by the artificial pyrotechny of paradox while seeming to illumine by the meteoric flash of wisdom. Moreover, the decadent ethics of the play's social utterances, contradicting its dramatic action, are more suggestive of the miasmatic marsh lights of the morass than of the brilliancy of the stars above them.

What claim to truth, not to say wit, is there in epigrams such as these: "Men are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and horribly conceited when they are bad." "There are two kinds of women in society — plain and coloured." "Twenty years of romance makes a woman a ruin; after twenty years of married life she resembles a public building." "My husband is like a promissory note; I'm tired of meeting him." "The House of Lords is never in touch with public opinion; that is what keeps it civilised." "He talks, but has no conversation." "Extravagance is the luxury of the poor."

It was noteworthy how the laughter at these and such like mechanical gibes, though loud at first, slackened at their iteration. This result was due probably to the heartless cynicism of the epigrams, which, having no relation to the plot, altogether block its progress through at least two out of the three hours the piece holds the stage. When it is allowed intermittent expression, the melodramatic story tells of a middle-aged peer, a cynical sensualist, engaging as his secretary, unconscious of the close relationship between them, his own son, born of the girl ruined and deserted by him 20 years before. The father, on chancing to meet his former victim in society, and having the boy's identity revealed to him by her, claims the youth, promising not only to make him his heir, but to marry the mother if she will give up her son. The double surrender is repudiated by the wronged lady as, slashing her glove across her wrecker's face, she dismisses him with scorn as "a man of no importance."

Mr. Tree plays his original part of the aristocratic libertine with such personal distinction as seems to half mask its depravity. Still, the question forces itself upon the spectator whether the callous selfishness of the villain is consistent with his sudden affection for his son, and the offer of atonement to the mother. Upon the part of the mother Miss Marion Terry brings to bear her wonderful

accumulation of womanly tenderness; but, however beautiful in itself, is not this a mistaken reading of the part? Not pathetic solicitude, but indignant scorn, is the emotion, according to the text, the avenged lady should exhibit to her wronger; and it was in this way that Mrs. Bernard Beere interpreted the character. Mrs. Calvert acts with a fine sense of natural humour the part of a garrulously sharp-tongued lady of society; and Miss Ellis Jeffreys justifies the cordial welcome she received on her return from New York by her elegant and high-bred impersonation of a leader of fashion. As an American ingenue, Miss Viola Tree acted with ingenuous grace, and the Misses Kate Cutler and Kate Bishop were of advantage to the cast in secondary parts. The natural son found a fitting exponent of his youthful impetuosity in Mr. Quartermaine, and Messrs. Fisher White, Chas. Allan, and Edmund Maurice individualised the lesser personages of the play with just comedy accomplishment.

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

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

[The Editor wishes it to be clearly understood that, whilst he is pleased to insert letters upon all subjects of interest to readers, he cannot be held responsible for any of the opinions ventilated by correspondents.]

### CONCERNING J. K. HUYSMANS.

To the Editor.

SIR,—Your interesting little wreath of words laid upon the grave of Huysmans reminds readers once more of that writer's really amazing book, "A Rebours."

It *should* have been what is generally termed, in the cant of the pen, "epoch-making." It was not. France, or Paris rather, was too deep in the sordid, horrid slough of naturalism to notice such work greatly. The mud of Catulle Mendes was in its eyes. In England the book had no effect whatsoever. It was too difficult to read, and an Englishman saves his thinking apparatus for the turf, the chase, and the accounts of his agent, bailiff, and banker.

The book would be hard to translate, but Arthur Symons tried his hand at some of it in the *Fortnightly* about ten years ago, and a famous living American, Mr. Chatfield-Taylor, put some of its pages and phrases into English in his brilliant novel, "Two Women and a Fool."

Huysmans' greatest book was made capital of in the trial of Oscar Wilde. It was supposed to be the book that poisoned the brain of Dorian Gray in Wilde's amazing story. In concluding, "A Rebours" *should* be translated somehow, if only for the rarity of its theme. Moreover, it has none of the modern French riot of carnival and bacchanal. It is an epic of the cerebral life.

Bookmen should love it for its glowing account of modern and mid-age writers; I mean its critical studies of the volumes in the library of Des Essientes, its protagonist. "A Rebours" was a literary victory almost of the very highest kind that is possible. Where is a translation of it?

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

May 1907.

# The Comedy of Literary Log-Rolling.

By FRANCIS GRIBBLE.

**H**ERE is an American story of an author who began his literary career by falling out of a second-floor window. He was so fat that he bounced up and down two or three times, and then rose and landed on an indiarubber ball, and then rose and landed upstairs. The incident got into the papers, and created so much interest that publishers who had previously fought shy of him now besieged his doors, bidding against each other for his manuscripts. The moral of the story is that literary success may sometimes be due to other causes than literary merit, and that any proceeding which calls attention to a writer's personality may help to sell his sales. Some writers have been foolish enough to recognise that fact, and have advertised themselves accordingly. In any complete history of literature the chronicle of such manoeuvres would have its place, for it would throw a good deal of fresh light upon the nature of the so called "eccentricities of literature."

appointing, and the advertisements had produced no result. The author decided, after reflection, that there was nothing for it but to shoot a Chinaman. Carrying his book under his arm, he walked into a restaurant and shot one, and then quietly surrendered himself to the police, explaining that he bore that particular Chinaman no grudge, but merely desired to obtain publicity for his views on Chinamen in general. He obtained it, though the price which the law exacted was heavy.

Literary duels, in the countries in which duelling still prevails, belong more or less to the same category, and are often inspired by the same motive. In England, indeed, where duels were often fatal, they have seldom been used for advertising purposes. When Charles Lever, for instance, went out, his object was not to make his personality interesting, but to kill or wing his man; but in France the case generally is, and generally has been, different. Sainte-Beuve, for example, got an excellent advertisement out

sometimes those eccentricities have been of a tragic character; and it is a little curious that the most startling instances of the morbid desire for literary notoriety come from the Colonies, where the conditions of open-air life in the new land are commonly supposed to promote a healthy development of mind. The only man who ever jumped into the crater of a volcano in order to draw the attention of the callous public to his neglected poetical works was a New Zealander; and it was also a New Zealander who committed a murder in order to give the world a sufficient motive for reading an economic treatise. He had written a pamphlet on the evils of Chinese cheap labour, and it had fallen into scorn from the press. His reviews had been dis-



"SAINTE-BEUVE, FOR EXAMPLE, GOT AN EXCELLENT ADVERTISEMENT OUT OF A DUEL, FOUGHT ON A WET DAY, BY INSISTING UPON HOLDING HIS UMBRELLA UP WITH ONE HAND WHILE HE FIRED HIS PISTOL WITH THE OTHER."

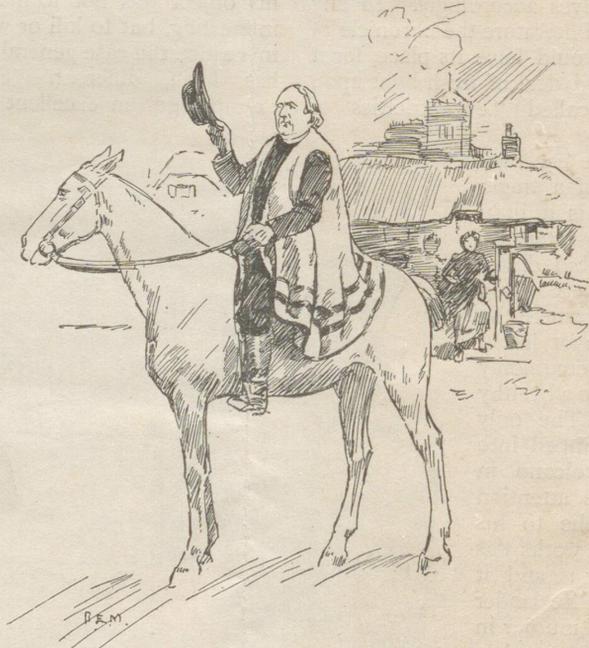
of a duel, fought on a wet day, by insisting upon holding his umbrella up with one hand while he fired his pistol with the other. He was willing, he courageously said, to take the risk of being shot; but he must be excused from taking the greater risk of catching cold. The duel which Benjamin Constant, who suffered from gout, fought, sitting in a Bath chair, may have been of somewhat similar character. Honour in that case was declared to be satisfied when the Bath chair was hit. A more recent case is that of a minor novelist who wrote a minor novel in which he libelled the Navy. He let it be known that he was not only ready, but anxious, to give "satisfaction" to any naval officer who considered himself aggrieved; and quite a number of naval officers—a simple-minded folk—were drawn. There was a duel every morning for a week or two, until at last the novelist retired hurt; and the novel enjoyed a brisk sale in consequence.

Eccentricity of dress and personal appearance is another device by which many authors have made themselves interesting. The case of Oscar Wilde, in his knee-breeches and velvet jacket, with a jewelled brooch in his long hair, is probably the best remembered; but there have been plenty of others. Disraeli, as all the world knows, draped his waistcoat with gold chains, and affected green trousers, and wore rings outside his gloves. M. Paul Bourget, now a model of elegant correctitude, also wore green trousers in the days when he dwelt in the Latin Quarter.

Parson Hawker, the Cornish poet, is even better remembered for the eccentricity of his garb than for his poetry, though he was a great poet. He rode about his parish in a poncho—which is just a blanket with

holes cut in it for the arms; his cassock all the colours of the rainbow; he attended his first wife's funeral in a pink hat with a brim; he was seen in the streets of provincial towns in a crimson jersey and waders. People naturally came to the conclusion that it might really be worth while to look at the poetry of a poet who had such a singular taste in dress.

George Sand's early popularity also probably owed something to her habit of going about the streets of Paris in male attire—hussar jacket, trousers, and a felt hat; the songs of Aristide Bruant—the songs which Yvette Guilbert used to sing in her early days—first gained an audience because the composer was never seen in any costume but that of a Californian gold-digger. This point could be further illustrated by many temporary English examples. There is William Le Queux's ambassadorial habit, for instance—a piece of head-gear which he seldom got out of sight for long, and is invariably associated in the public mind with interesting stories of mystery and crime. The



"PARSON HAWKER RODE ABOUT HIS PARISH IN A PONCHO."

"Lobsters," said the poet, "neither bite, and, besides, they know the sea." The humble example is that of the unknown poet who, having to find a market for his poetry, became a costermonger

also—but personal reputation had better be kept within reasonable limits.

Eccentric behaviour is a natural consequence of eccentric dress; and probably the more of it the better. Paris is the world where else you can give one his eccentric and one his eccentric example. The illustration of Gérard Nerval, who noted his strange tastes, and sometimes in public leading a

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# Lloyds

May 26.

## AN INTERESTING REVIVAL.

**T**O be interesting and yet disappointing seems to be a false position. The revival of "A Woman of No Importance" at His Majesty's, eagerly looked for, finds us a little out of sympathy with its subject and its style. The play, after a lapse of fourteen years, reveals its artificiality too much.

Oscar Wilde never fulfilled his mission in the dramatic world. One always expected greater things of him, yet his brilliant cynicisms, his verbal fireworks, were popular and ever quoted. How familiar are "I look upon my husband as a promissory note I am tired of meeting" and "Extravagance is the luxury of the poor," or even "Men are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and horribly conceited when they are bad."

The story, one admits, is such as would be found in any melodrama, but fine acting lifts it out of the rut. Mr. Tree, as the cynical Lord Illingworth, is at his ease equally in epigrammatic or blood-curdling moments. The scene wherein this fine specimen of nobility coolly offers marriage to the woman he wronged many years back goes with a rare swing, and when he receives in response that contemptuous blow in the face one can trace the thrill of emotion running through the audience. Miss Marion Terry makes much of the pathetic side of this lady, but it is Mr. Charles Quartermaine, as Gerald, the son without a father, who is so fine. There is something very vigorous and youthful in the impersonation. Mrs. Charles Calvert is a dear garrulous old lady to the life, and Miss Viola Tree makes a brave effort to be natural and interesting as Hester Worsley, and Miss Kate Bishop and Miss Kate Custer do much of the smaller parts.

Academy May 25

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

There were many people who remembered the first night of the play at the Haymarket on April 19, 1993, and perhaps a few of them regretted that the author was not alive and present to witness the brilliant performance of Miss Viola Tree as Hester Worsley. It is a most difficult part. Miss Tree realised to a supreme degree the beauty of the lines she had to say, and Miss Marion Terry was, of course, born for the "purple patches" of Wilde's dramas. Every one knew Miss Terry would be perfect. We did not know that Miss Viola Tree was the ideal impersonation of the character.

2019-03-18

Jissen Women's University Library

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

The engine ambles along in solitary state. The time never varies, and railway enthusiasts may be interested to know that the engine is always either a "Claud Hamilton" or a 2-4-0 rebuilt with a bogie. Excuse me, gentle reader. I was once stroking a pair, and in a fit of abstraction I tried to take the time from the

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part. Miss Tree realised to a supreme degree the duty of the lines she had to say, and Miss Marion Terry's, of course, born for the "purple patches" of Wilde's dramas. Every one knew Miss Terry would be perfect. He did not know that Miss Viola Tree was the ideal personation of Hester.

Grant.  
25 May 1907

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## MY RIVER FRIENDS.

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IT is quite possible, psychologists tell us, to be on terms of intimate friendship with people, or even things, which one has never had any communication with. It is not impossible to fall in love with the heroine of a novel, or to confide your most intimate thoughts and aspirations to the hero and the villain. So it will not come as a shock when I say that I have my friends on the banks of the River Cam.

Firstly, there is Oscar Wilde. Why do I call him Oscar Wilde? I cannot say, for the life of me. He bears no resemblance in any respect to that playwright. And here again psychology comes in. If a novelist says her heroine is "*petite* and *æthereal*," it does not follow that I think of her as such. And if her name is Susan, I picture her as large and lumbering. Nor does the description of the hero's study interest me. I skip it, and he ponders over his love affairs in a room I know very well. So it is with Oscar Wilde. The usual coach is very like every other coach. He is tall and strong, and undergraduatish, and dressed in a blazer, and rides a bike. Oscar is different. He rides a bike, it is true, but he has projecting teeth like a rabbit, and a revolting kind of brown squash-hat, like a *passé* bowler. He looks gloomy, as if he had just come from Reading Gaol. The fact that he has just taken his crew to the bottom does not, I think, justify his wearing that "*De profundis*" attitude. I am sure he has a secret sorrow, and I am dying to know it. If we could *only* confide our woes in one another! As it is, I am very fond of him, but I think on the whole that I would rather not meet him. So many illusions might be shattered.

Then I have an inanimate friend. The G.E.R. Co. always sends a light engine from Ely to Cambridge about three o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot say why. The more usual practice among district superintendents is to make the engine help another train along, even though the proper engine is perfectly competent to pull the train alone. But not so the G.E.R. authorities.

The engine ambles along in solitary state. The time never varies, and railway enthusiasts may be interested to know that the engine is always either a "Claud Hamilton" or a 2-4-0 rebuilt with a bogie. Excuse me, gentle reader. I was once stroking a pair, and in a fit of abstraction I tried to take the time from the coupling rods of my old friend. No, we were not drowned that time. I can't say why I like that engine. I suppose it is because it is so lonely. I know that if the G.E.R. discontinued to run it I should feel I had a real grievance.

Then there is my friend the reporter. He has whiskers. Shade of Frank Richardson! He rides a singularly old-fashioned bike, and looks dull. I feel sure he is a dissenter. I do not mean to imply that dissenters are dull; I have a great respect for all save the pugnacious dissenters. But he has the dissenter face and the dissenter mind. When I used to do the rowing notes for this paper, I rode along the bank with him following the University boat, and we got into conversation. I am sorry to say I used to stuff him up badly about rowing, and tell him the wrong times, and so on. If Mr. Jones came down to see the boat, I used to say it was Mr. Brown. Then I bought his beastly paper and read:—"The crew were accompanied by a number of old Blues, including Mr. J. Brown . . ." I feel sorry I did it now, and often want to tell him how sorry I am. I still meet him on the tow-path, and he looks at me with a reproachful sadness, as a dog does if you beat him more than he thinks he deserves. The pathetic part of it all is that his life must be so dull. Generation after generation of undergraduates goes by, and still he rides that old bike, and writes his article after tea. I wish I could get him a post on this paper, just to brighten his lot a little, but I do not know the editors well enough yet, I fear.

Then there is the parson. He has blue eyes and whiskers. Shades of F. R.! He is the living image of a farmer, and I think that constant contact with that class of men has made him resemble them facially. He is accompanied by a dog—a collie. His lot is not so hard as the reporter's, or as many country parsons'. He must, I think, be vicar of some parish near Baitsbite—Ditton, perhaps—so he can easily get to Cambridge and be in contact with culture. He is not isolated, like many country parsons. Still, I feel we ought to know one another.

I have a few more river friends, but I cannot spare the time to tell you about them.

R. H.

THE CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS

The extraordinary action of the Lord Chamberlain's department with regard to The Mikado, deplorable as it is alike from the artistic and the political standpoint, will not be wholly matter for regret if its result is to direct public attention to the absurdities of our whole system of licensing plays.

As the details of that system are not generally known in this country it will perhaps be well to explain briefly the nature of the English dramatic censorship and the principles on which it is administered.

A licence from the Lord Chamberlain. And here we meet with one of the most glaring anomalies of the system. No dramatist can get his play licensed in England at all.

The system on which plays are licensed in England being of this gloriously haphazard description it is not surprising that the wrong plays are constantly refused.

interest in the subject in hand the result is inevitably chaos. The plays which have been refused a licence during the past few years include Monna Vanna and Sister Beatrice by Maeterlinck, Ghosts by Ibsen, La Citta Morta by D'Annunzio, The Cenci by Shelley, three plays by Brieux (The Three Daughters of M. Dupont, Maternité and Les Hannelons), Mrs. Warren's Profession by Bernard Shaw, Salomé by Oscar Wilde and now The Mikado.

We have spoken of the "principles" on which the Censor's decisions are based, but it is not easy to say what those principles are.

the Shaw plays were probably refused on account of their subjects. The Brieux and the Ibsen ones because they were immoral (!). But there is no knowing. The secrets of the licensing mind are well guarded.

Daily Telegraph, June 1

From the "Academy": "It is a rule of the Lord Chamberlain's office that no Biblical subject or character should be presented on the English stage unless the play was written before the days of Sir Robert Walpole.

Musical Standard. June 8, 1907

From "The Academy": "It is a rule of the Lord Chamberlain's office that no Biblical subject or character should be presented on the English stage unless the play was written before the days of Sir Robert Walpole.

AMUSEMENTS.

JESTY'S THEATRE.

of No Importance." Mr. Tree closed his gallery lately diminished, temporarily, on opening by 6ft. by 7ft., the that the revival of his Hay-

will remember that the lady he play is a Mrs. Arbuthnot, and (Mr. Quartermain, original Mr. Fred Terry) attracts the he rich and powerful Lord

was very richly mounted, superficially witty and fresh, and is overcrowded with epigrams, many of a feeble character.

nothing but praise can be said of the heartless and dissolute vengeance with "Smart Set" as, is an exceedingly finished trait, and he is most ably ably arion Terry in the pathetic role, created by Mrs. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as sensuous Mrs. Alenby, of Hillingworth, is a sensation than was Mrs. a Tree is charming as the orsley, originally played by Mrs. Alenby and great assistance given to her by Messrs. Fisher White, Charles Calvert, and the p and Kate Cutler in the actors. The representation will be improved when time. Mr. Tree at the audience for their cordial and the players.

is an audience primed for a great treat which awaited the revival of Wilde's great play, "A Woman of No Importance," at His Majesty's, on Friday. For it is a great play, and use was kept in rapt attention to the final fall of the curtain, and Mr. Tree called to acknowledge a tremendous ovation. The story itself is commonplace, and suffices as a foundation for the elaborate embroidery of brilliant dialogue in which the revelled, and of which he was such master. Fourteen years have not lessened that brilliance and the witty wit, so many of which are ruthless in their sarcasm and cynical truth, were as fresh as ever. Mr. Tree, the original of the imperturbable, polished wit, resumed the part, and gave a subtle rendering of the role. Miss Terry's sympathetic nature has been brought out all the sweetness of her character of Mrs. Arbuthnot, whilst Mr. Tree's Puritanical sternness in the wilderness," showed Miss Tree as a rapidly improving actress. Alenby, Miss Ellis Jeffreys adroitly portrayed the smart woman who is smart things to say, while Mrs. Hunsington, acted the part to the Mr. Charles Quartermain played Arbuthnot with earnestness, while Kate Cutler and Mr. Fisher White tributed good work. Mr. Tree's revival promises to be one of the most successful of the many he has undertaken.

MAA&P (MAINLY ABOUT PEOPLE)

A POPULAR PENNY WEEKLY OF PLEASANT GOSSIP, PERSONAL PORTRAITS, AND SOCIAL NEWS.

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THINGS I THINK ABOUT.

BY JAMES DOUGLAS.

The Age of Tolerance. THE world seems to be growing happier as it grows older. The milk of human kindness is more plentiful than it used to be, and good humour is almost a universal habit.

Restoring the Restoration. OSCAR WILDE in the heyday of his fame was a popular cynic. He lived up to his own witty definition of the cynic as

a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. His polished epigrams were directed against the simple workaday human qualities. He derided every form of sincerity and honesty and fidelity. He gilded vice and defaced virtue. He identified goodness with stupidity and constancy with boredom.

The Hero Turns Villain. THE alchemy of time turns villains into heroes and heroes into villains. Shylock was a villain to the Elizabethan playgoer. He is a hero to us. There has been a shifting of the centre of our imaginative sympathy.

THE extraordinary action of the department with regard to *The* is alike from the artistic and the direct public attention to the system of licensing plays. The as a rule comes under the notice Nine times out of ten he is prof that the Lord Chamberlain is int interfere with his amusements a tenth time some piece of more brings home to him the outrage under which our drama is govern happens the end of the present nearer.

As the details of that system in this country it will perhaps be the nature of the English dram principles on which it is adm Reader of Plays (to give him his subordinate official in the Lorc ment. It is his duty to read ey posed to perform publicly in Gre the Lord Chamberlain whether formance shall be granted or appears, is exempt from his mini explains why Ireland to-day has zealously engaged in fostering a some artistic sincerity while En licence for a play is refused no pt theatre or hall in Great Britain that decision there is no appeal. mere deputy of a Court official, Office and is not responsible to or take away his powers would r though, of course, the spirit in might be modified if wiser views prevailed at the Lord Chamber Lord Chamberlain is not selected ties or for his knowledge of co exists for a totally different pur ladies who attend Drawing-room door and have the right length o that direction is to be looked for stage play can be performed pub

a licence from the Lord Chamber with one of the most glaring *No dramatist can get his play lic* A licence can only be granted to t In England, it seems, dramatists exist, only theatrical managers. wishes to have the play licen through a manager, and if, as desires to get it licensed before been made as to production at a can only do this through the manager whom he chances to l man of letters who has no acqu world his play must go unlicen acquaintance. In this country man of letters having anything so abhorrent to the Lord Cham they feel bound to exert all command to prevent so disast though the existence of the dr at the Lord Chamberlain's o licensing a play, a fee is exacte ing (or the withholding) of t guinea for a one-act play, and tw than one act. The author, in f his play read though he is not reading purposes or to receive be granted, an illuminating ins the official mind when it has t

The system on which plays being of this gloriously hapha surprising that the wrong play the Censor and the right play problem of deciding what to a any department whether of a almost insoluble, and is indeed any Censorship at all. But wh hands of a Department which l

Shylock is simply Marlowe's Barabas. The opening scenes are charged with anti-semitism, but as the play goes on Shakespeare makes Shylock the representative of a great race wronged. He shows the spectator a cruelty greater than Shylock's cruelty, the cruelty of the race to which his persecuting bondman belonged. "When I saw this play at Drury Lane," said Heine, speaking of Kean's impersonation, "there stood behind me in the box a fair, pale Briton, who, at the end of the fourth act, fell a-weeping passionately, several times exclaiming, 'The poor man is wronged!'" Just as imaginative sympathy wrought a change in the attitude of Shakespeare, and in that of the English people towards the Jews, so imaginative sympathy has wrought a change in our attitude towards the homely qualities at which Wilde sneered. Lord Illingworth was a hero at the Haymarket: he is a villain at His Majesty's. Mr. Tree's subtle portrait of the brilliant blackguard arouses the admiration of disgust, not the admiration of envy. We pity him as heartily as we pity Shylock; but our pity is mixed with contempt.

I Believe in Man.

The decay of cynicism is associated with a great renaissance of faith in human nature. We feel that Illingworth is a literary monster, and not a real man. His inhuman depravity does not shock us, because it does not deceive us. We do not take it seriously, just as we do not take the inhuman depravity of Shylock seriously. Illingworth, indeed, has become a burlesque of Wilde. He has become a satire on Wilde; just as Wilde himself became a satire on cynicism. We see only the seamy side of the wit. The cynic wears badly. Abstract vice is more tiresome than abstract virtue. It is not possible to make life as rapturous as the lyric of a lark, but at least we can enjoy the sunlight without filtering it through the dirty windows. The art of happiness is not the art of exasperated sensations, but the art of simplified sincerities. The tragedy of the cynic is his baffled attempt to escape from life by outraging it, to achieve immortality by committing suicide. The really original wit is the wit that satirises the sensualist and ridicules the voluptuary. It is an old-fashioned superstition to imagine that sin is amusing. When Wilde says that a saint is a man with a past and a sinner is a man with a future, he inverts the truth. The man who is indentured to his appetites is a slave who can never be expatriated. It is bad to serve a tyrant who is outside you; it is worse to serve a tyrant who is inside you. You may kill the one; the other will kill you.

The Sparkling City.

The modern note is sympathy with every phase of life. "Give us the necessities," we cry, "and we can do without the luxuries." I am a firm believer in the ability of human beings to be happy. I am sure that most of us are happier than our friends think we are. Husbands and wives love each other more devotedly than we suspect. Marriage in nine cases out of ten is a gilt-edged stock, and not a rotten company. It begins with romance and ends in comradeship—two of the best things in the world. The happiest man is the married veteran. The unhappiest man is the lonely voluptuary who labours wearily towards his distant grave:—

He seems as one whose footsteps halt,  
Tolling in immeasurable sand,  
And o'er a weary, sultry land,  
Far beneath a blazing vault,  
Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,  
The city sparkles like a grain of salt.

That is why I call Wilde the last of the cynics. But I like to remember that he had glimpses of the sparkling city, brief visions of its simple human splendours and its common human glories,—unselfish love, tender self-sacrifice, vigilant sympathy, reverence and compassion, and fierce fidelity. He too was human in his weaker moods, though he was not strong enough to be triumphantly weak. It takes a strong man to yield humbly to his own higher instincts and to cower abjectly before his own conscience.

JAMES DOUGLAS.

"M.A.P." readers should not fail to order Next Week's Number in advance, as there is sure to be a huge demand. In that issue

MISS ELLEN TERRY

begins

Her Life Story.

Do not forget. Out next Thursday, June 6

M. A. P. IN SOCIETY.

A Royal "Handy-Man."

PRINCE ARTHUR OF CONNAUGHT, who represented King Edward at the christening of the Prince of Asturias, and who had the honour of being chosen to reply at the State banquet for all the foreign princes assembled in Madrid, has been aptly called the "handy-man" of the Royal Family. He is only twenty-four, but already he has represented His Majesty at remarkable number of important State ceremonies, such as the christening of the little Italian Crown Prince, and that of the son and heir of the German Crown Prince, as well as at number of Royal funerals. Most important of all in a political sense was his visit to Japan to invest the Mikado with the Order of the Garter—the visit which Prince Fushimi has just been returning.

An Eligible Royal Bachelor.

PRINCE ARTHUR, who is regarded with feelings of special affection by King Edward, is certainly one of the most eligible of Royal bachelors, and the question of his marriage is one of deep interest, not only to his Royal kinsfolk, but also to the whole nation. It would not, perhaps, be surprising if he were to woo and win a Princess of the Imperial House of Russia, with which our own Royal Family has already such close links. His name was associated, some time ago, with the pretty and brilliantly gifted daughter of a great British duke. The Prince goes a great deal into general society, he is fond of dancing, and is a fine horseman. His most intimate man friend is young Lord Hastings, with whom, in the latter's bachelor days, he shared a house at Norwich.

Assassins of Royalty.

THE recent diabolical plot to murder the Tsar and the infant Cesarewitch by means of two tiny infernal machines, the size of watches, reminds us that Royal personages, as well as heads of Republics, are in constant danger of such attempts. It is said, indeed, that they become fatalists as the only way of preserving their peace of mind. King Humbert of Italy always had a startled expression in his eyes from the day that he escaped almost unhurt from Passanti's dagger at Naples until he was shot by Bresci more than twenty years later. King Edward's life has only been attempted once—by Sipido at Brussels—but Queen Victoria suffered five attacks, all by shooting. It is a curious fact that, on the whole, Presidents have been quite as often the object of attacks as Monarchs. Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley, of the United States, were all murdered, as was also President Carnot, while one has quite lost count of the number of South American Presidents who have been "removed."

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

If "A Woman of No Importance" had ended with its third act there would have been very little doubt about the success of its revival at His Majesty's on Wednesday evening. It may have been that as some have told us the story of Mrs. Arbuthnot, her illegitimate son, and his gracefully worthless father had worn rather thin and seemed more than a trifle insincere. But the sentimental interest of the piece was never its strong point, and what was best in Wilde's work had remained, up to the point which we have mentioned, as irresistible as ever. It is all very well to sneer at a trick of dialogue which any theatrical hack could imitate—with a difference—as soon as Wilde had invented the original for him to copy. What one would like to see pointed out is the playwright who, since the premature passing of the brilliant author of "Lady Windermere's Fan" and "A Woman of No Importance," has attained in his dialogue such literary ease and finish of diction, such grace of wit and such perfection of phrasing. It is not as though there were nothing in it all, except that invention of the inverted epigram which is made so characteristic as well as so effective in the cynically smiling mouths of Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Allenby. There are quick light touches of profound feeling, not only for the unhappy Mrs. Arbuthnot, but for the light-hearted voluptuary to whom she owes her unhappiness. There is poetry behind and beneath the prose: there is the soft light of real human, very human, feeling as well as the dazzling glitter from artificial sallies of self-conscious humour. The charm of the style has survived if the substance is now found to have lost some of the little vitality which it once possessed.

These things being so, it was particularly unfortunate that on the first night of the revival Mr. Tree's obvious difficulty over the words of a part for which 14 years ago he proved himself admirably fitted caused the performance to drag exactly where alert assurance was most needed in order to gloss over the admitted weaknesses of the play itself. Thus, through hesitation of handling, all the defects of the last act were so emphasised as to destroy the delightful influence of what had gone before. No Lord Illingworth could look or pose the part better than did Mr. Tree's. No Mrs. Arbuthnot could well be more gracious or tender or gravely pathetic than was Miss Marion Terry's. But in their scenes together, especially at the close of the second act, and throughout the great difficulties of the fourth, they seemed so uncertain of one another that they dared nothing beyond a mere sketch of their excellent intentions. Hence the play was let down just where it most needed keeping up. When Mr. Tree is at his own best his revival will gain immensely in its chances of lasting favour.

For the rest, the cast secured is, on the whole, very good indeed. Nothing could well be happier than the selection of Miss Ellis Jeffreys for Mrs. Allenby. Her conversational brightness has the true note of fashionable "smartness," and her reckless epigrams seem to fit her as well as does her glittering gown. Mrs. Charles Calvert is exquisitely funny in the amiable commonplace of Lady Hunstanton, and so also is Mr. Maurice in the breezy clerical optimism of the Archdeacon, who is so cheerfully sympathetic in his references to his invalid wife. The young couple are embodied pleasantly enough by Miss Viola Tree and Mr. Charles Quartermaine, though without any adequate sense of character in the one case or of comedy restraint in the other. Miss Kate Cutler and Miss Kate Bishop act smoothly and neatly and Mr. Allan repeats a former success. The revival is beautifully mounted and gains in drawing-room effectiveness from the new device by which Mr. Tree can now diminish the apparent size of his fine stage.

SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL.

"A Woman of No Importance."

IT seems incredible that fourteen years have elapsed since I contributed to this journal a notice of the first performance of "A Woman of No Importance"—and already I had served a full term of apprenticeship to my beloved "Sunday Chronicle." On Wednesday night Mr. Tree revived the play which established Oscar Wilde's fame as a dramatist.

It induced, I recall, one of the few really enthusiastic notices ever contributed to the world by Mr. William Archer, who declared that "in intellectual calibre, artistic competence, eye, and in dramatic instinct to boot, Mr. Wilde had no rival among his fellow workers for the stage."

Into the sequel of that brilliant beginning there is no need to go. Now, we have recovered the mental balance which permits us to view the artist again in Oscar Wilde, and to agree that Mr. Archer was not far wrong.

There has, of course, been a complete recasting of the play, with the exception that Mr. Tree resumes his "original" character of Lord Illingworth. We get that consummate actress Miss Marion Terry, charming Miss Ellis Jeffreys, ambitious Miss Viola Tree, delightful Mrs. Charles Calvert, useful Miss Kate Bishop, pretty Miss Kate Cutler.

The reception of "A Woman of No Importance" was so friendly as to induce the belief that it might have quite a long run, were Mr. Tree so disposed; but he is notoriously restless, and simply accepts a success as the guerdon of five minutes' leisure to discuss the next production at Her Majesty's. There are, by the way, afternoon performances of "Hamlet," incidental to "A Woman of No Importance."

MAY 26, 1907.

Weekly Dispatch

Disappointing Revival at His Majesty's.

The revival of "A Woman of No Importance" on Wednesday evening at His Majesty's Theatre was something of a disappointment, the artificial character of Oscar Wilde's story and its treatment being painfully exposed by the failure of several people on the stage to remember their lines, and the wholly wrong way in which the parts were cast. The piece stood so sadly in need of a few more rehearsals that I am surprised that Mr. Tree, who acted very well, did not postpone the revival for at least another week.

Mr. Tree was not absolutely word perfect himself, but he came through with his performance with credit, and I must confess that my sympathy was with him, and not with the woman, Mrs. Arbuthnot, who bored with her ceaseless complainings and twenty-year-old grievances. Her mechanical hatred of Lord Illingworth from the injury done her when he was but a boy was absolute proof that she never loved him, and consequently the attempt to get sympathy for her fell—in my opinion—very flat. In the prettish American girl to express her hatred of Lord Illingworth freely—the lady had a sympathetic companion, and when the last curtain fell on the tableau of Gerald with these two women I could not help feeling that for a young and innocent man he was going to be punished heavily indeed. The best performance of the evening were given by Mr. Tree, Mr. Edmund Maurice, and Miss Ellis Jeffreys.

PUBLIC AMUSEMENTS.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"A Woman of No Importance."

On Wednesday Mr. Tree closed his gallery and very ingeniously diminished, temporarily, his proscenium-opening by 6ft. by 7ft., the reason being that the revival of his Haymarket success of some fourteen years ago—the late Mr. Oscar Wilde's mechanical and artificial comedy, "A Woman of No Importance"—naturally requires a much smaller stage than do the splendid spectacles to which we have been accustomed under the present popular management.

Old playgoers will remember that the lady of the title of the play is a Mrs. Arbuthnot, whose son Gerald (Mr. Quartermaine, originally played by Mr. Fred Terry) attracts the attention of the world fair make him his secretary and superintend his political career. But he soon learns that Gerald is his own son by the gentle lady he seduced and abandoned. Gerald learns the truth from his mother in a most dramatic scene when he would kill his lordship for attempting to brutally kiss his young fiancée, an American puritan. There are other equally powerful scenes between the elderly pair and in their final separation, which, being splendidly enacted, evoked much enthusiasm.

The comedy was very richly mounted. The dialogue is superficially witty and frequently frivolous, and is overcrowded with paradoxes and epigrams, many of a feeble and untruthful character. Perhaps the best line in the play is "The Peasage is the best thing in fiction that the English have ever done." The paradoxes are too elaborately ingenious. The author's cleverness is undoubted, but there is so much evidence of striving after effect that the play and the characters appear to lack sincerity, nor are the latter so well drawn or as consistent as they might have been.

Of the acting, nothing but praise can be awarded. Mr. Tree's heartless and dissolute Lord Illingworth, versed with "Smart Set" grace and politeness, is an exceedingly finished and impressive portrait, and he is most ably helped by Miss Marion Terry in the pathetic and dignified title role, created by Mrs. Bernard Besse. Miss Ellis Jeffreys as the worldly and sensuous Mrs. Allenby, a coarser art of Illingworth, is a much stronger presentation than was Mrs. Tree's. Miss Viola Tree is charming as the Puritan, Hester Worsley, originally played by Miss Julia Neilson and great assistance is rendered, amongst others, by Messrs. Edmund Maurice, Fisher White, Charles Allan, and Mrs. Charles Calvert. And the Misses Kate Bishop and Kate Cutler in the other leading characters. The representation of the comedy will be improved when taken in quicker time. Mr. Tree at the finish, thanked the audience for their cordial reception of the play and the players.

NEWS OF THE WORLD

It was an audience primed for a great dramatic treat which awaited the revival of Oscar Wilde's great play, "A Woman of No Importance," at His Majesty's, on Wednesday. For it is a great play, and the house was kept in rapt attention until the final fall of the curtain, and Mr. Tree was called to acknowledge a tremendous ovation. The story itself is comparatively commonplace, and suffices as a foundation for the elaborate embroidery of brilliant epigrammatic dialogue in which the author revelled, and of which he was such a past master. Fourteen years have not dimmed that brilliance and the witty sayings, so many of which are ruthless in their daring and cynical truth, were as eagerly caught up by the interested audience as ever. Mr. Tree, the original exponent of the imperturbable, polished arch-cynic, resumed the part, and gave a careful, subtle rendering of the role. Miss Marion Terry's sympathetic nature enabled her to bring out all the sweetness of the character of Mrs. Arbuthnot, whilst Hester Worsley, that Puritanical "teacher in the wilderness," showed Miss Viola Tree as a rapidly improving actress. As Mrs. Allenby, Miss Ellis Jeffreys admirably portrayed the smart woman who has many smart things to say, while Mrs. Charles Calvert, as the stupid, talkative old Lady Hunstanton, acted the part to the life. Mr. Charles Quartermaine played Gerald Arbuthnot with earnestness, while Miss Kate Cutler and Mr. Fisher White also contributed good work. Mr. Tree's present revival promises to be one of the most successful of the many he has undertaken.

## THE CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS

THE extraordinary action of the Lord Chamberlain's department with regard to *The Mikado*, deplorable as it is alike from the artistic and the political standpoint, will not be wholly matter for regret if its result is to direct public attention to the absurdities of our whole system of licensing plays. The subject is not one which as a rule comes under the notice of the ordinary man. Nine times out of ten he is probably quite unconscious that the Lord Chamberlain is interfering or has power to interfere with his amusements at the theatre. But the tenth time some piece of more than ordinary stupidity brings home to him the outrageous character of the rules under which our drama is governed, and every time this happens the end of the present system is brought a step nearer.

As the details of that system are not generally known in this country it will perhaps be well to explain briefly the nature of the English dramatic censorship and the principles on which it is administered. The King's Reader of Plays (to give him his correct designation) is a subordinate official in the Lord Chamberlain's department. It is his duty to read every play which it is proposed to perform publicly in Great Britain and to advise the Lord Chamberlain whether a licence for such performance shall be granted or withheld. Ireland, it appears, is exempt from his ministrations, which perhaps explains why Ireland to-day has an active literary theatre zealously engaged in fostering a contemporary drama of some artistic sincerity while England has not. If the licence for a play is refused no public performance in any theatre or hall in Great Britain can be given, and from that decision there is no appeal. The licenser, being the mere deputy of a Court official, is not under the Home Office and is not responsible to Parliament. To curtail or take away his powers would require special legislation, though, of course, the spirit in which they are exercised might be modified if wiser views as to artistic questions prevailed at the Lord Chamberlain's office. But as the Lord Chamberlain is not selected for his artistic proclivities or for his knowledge of contemporary drama, but exists for a totally different purpose, namely, to see that ladies who attend Drawing-rooms drive up to the right door and have the right length of train, no alteration in that direction is to be looked for. Be this as it may, no stage play can be performed publicly in England without

a licence from the Lord Chamberlain. And here we meet with one of the most glaring anomalies of the system. No dramatist can get his play licensed in England at all. A licence can only be granted to the manager of a theatre. In England, it seems, dramatists are not supposed to exist, only theatrical managers. If a dramatist therefore wishes to have the play licensed he must submit it through a manager, and if, as may easily happen, he desires to get it licensed before any arrangements have been made as to production at any particular theatre, he can only do this through the friendly offices of some manager whom he chances to know. If he is merely a man of letters who has no acquaintances in the theatrical world his play must go unlicensed until he makes such acquaintance. In this country apparently the idea of a man of letters having anything to do with the drama is so abhorrent to the Lord Chamberlain's department that they feel bound to exert all the influence at their command to prevent so disastrous a connection. But though the existence of the dramatist is not recognised at the Lord Chamberlain's office for the purpose of licensing a play, a fee is exacted from him for the granting (or the withholding) of that licence, namely, one guinea for a one-act play, and two guineas for a play in more than one act. The author, in fact, has to pay for having his play read though he is not allowed to submit it for reading purposes or to receive a licence for it if a licence be granted, an illuminating instance of the workings of the official mind when it has to deal with the artist.

The system on which plays are licensed in England being of this gloriously haphazard description it is not surprising that the wrong plays are constantly passed by the Censor and the right plays constantly refused. The problem of deciding what to allow and what to forbid in any department whether of art or morals is notoriously almost insoluble, and is indeed one great argument against any censorship at all. But when the duty is in the hands of a Department which has no knowledge of and no

interest in the subject in hand the result is inevitably chaos. The plays which have been refused a licence during the past few years include *Monna Vanna* and *Sister Beatrice* by Maeterlinck, *Ghosts* by Ibsen, *La Citta Morte* by D'Annunzio, *The Cenci* by Shelley, three plays by Brieux (*The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*, *Maternité* and *Les Hannelons*), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by Bernard Shaw, *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde and now *The Mikado*. There are of course, many others, but these are the more conspicuous examples. Why were these plays refused a licence? Why does the Lord Chamberlain license *Zaza* and reject *Mrs. Warren's Profession*? Why does he accept *Sapho* and refuse *Les Hannelons*? Is *Ghosts* a less ennobling and artistically admirable piece of work than *A Wife Without a Smile*? Is *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont* which he banned a depraving play and *Education du Prince* which he blessed an elevating one? We cannot think so. We admit the enormous difficulties of the Censor's position. It would probably be impossible to fill that position without making mistakes. But we maintain that the present Censor makes very many more mistakes than are at all necessary, and that a drastic reconsideration of the principles on which his decisions are based is imperatively required. And we also suggest that if the administration of the Censorship is quite so difficult as it appears, it is at least a question whether the office had not better be abolished and its functions left to the Police who already have power to interfere in the theatre whenever decency or order require.

We have spoken of the "principles" on which the Censor's decisions are based, but it is not easy to say what those principles are. The rejection of *Monna Vanna*, for example, has always puzzled even the most zealous defenders of the present system. The legend is that the Censor misread the stage direction which bids *Monna Vanna* enter, "*nue sous un manteau*" as "*nue sans un manteau*" and, blushing, refused a licence. But it may be only a legend. The D'Annunzio and the Shelley and

the Shaw plays were probably refused on account of their subjects. The Brieux and the Ibsen ones because they were immoral (!). But there is no knowing. The secrets of the licensing mind are well guarded. *Salomé* no doubt was refused because its cast includes persons mentioned in Scripture, and it is a rule of the Lord Chamberlain's office that no Biblical subject or character should be presented on the English stage unless the play was written before the days of Sir Robert Walpole. This rule, it will be remembered, was enforced in the case of Massenet's opera *Hérodiade*, the characters of which had to have their names altered before the work could be given at Covent Garden! The same principle, no doubt, will apply to Strauss's *Salomé*, and London will be cut off from all chance of hearing the most famous opera of to-day unless Herr Strauss (and Mr. Wilde's literary executor) consent to the alteration of *Salomé's* name to Mary Ann and Herod's to Harrods. Then the cause of religion will have been safeguarded from the corrupting influence of the theatre—and the Censorship will have made itself so unutterably ludicrous that its days will be numbered even in this solemn country. It is therefore much to be hoped from every point of view that music-lovers in London will make every effort to secure the performance of Strauss's opera in London during the present season. Opera in England to-day has a powerful backing among the rich and intelligent classes of the community, and they are both able and willing to exert their influence on behalf of the art which they love. If they bestir themselves Strauss's opera will be performed here. If the drama in this country had ever succeeded in enlisting a similar measure of intelligence and enthusiasm on its side the Censorship of plays in its present form would not have survived till now. It would have perished of its own ineptitude.

## Daily Telegraph, June 1

From the "Academy": "It is a rule of the Lord Chamberlain's office that no Biblical subject or character should be presented on the English stage unless the play was written before the days of Sir Robert Walpole. This rule, it will be remembered, was enforced in the case of Massenet's opera, 'Hérodiade,' the characters of which had to have their names altered before the work could be given at Covent Garden. The same principle, no doubt, will apply to Strauss's 'Salomé,' and London will be cut off from all chance of hearing the most famous opera of to-day unless Herr Strauss (and Mr. Wilde's literary executor) consent to the alteration of *Salomé's*

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# Musical Standard.

June 8-1907

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# M.A.A.P.

(MAINLY ABOUT PEOPLE)

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## THINGS I THINK ABOUT.

By JAMES DOUGLAS.

### The Age of Tolerance.

THE world seems to be growing happier as it grows older. The milk of human kindness is more plentiful than it used to be, and good humour is almost a universal habit. Ill-natured people are nearly as extinct as the dodo or the punster. Kindness of heart is so common that it has ceased to be a virtue. Everybody is kind-hearted. Few of us can boast of possessing an enemy, and there is hardly a good hater left in London. We all find it blessedly easy to forgive and forget, and blessedly hard to cultivate the art of resentment. It is the age of tolerance. We give each other the benefit of the doubt. We recognise the right of every human being to be different from his fellows, and we do not regard a twist of temperament as a personal affront. We are eager to take a charitable view of each other. We give a good deal more than we take. The cynic seems to us an old fogey. He is out of fashion. The change which has been wrought has been very swift and silent. It is not easy to explain it, for it has come gently and graciously without any conscious effort of the public will. All we know is that whereas twenty years ago it was the mode to be a cynic, it is now the mode to be a genial, good-natured man. The completeness of this revolution in our point of view was brought home to me very forcibly as I sat in my stall at the first night of *A Woman of No Importance*. I looked round me and I tried to find a cynic in the audience. I could not detect one, although there were representatives of every profession and avocation and rank and class.

### Restoring the Restoration.

OSCAR WILDE in the heyday of his fame was a popular cynic. He lived up to his own witty definition of the cynic as

a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. His polished epigrams were directed against the simple workaday human qualities. He derided every form of sincerity and honesty and fidelity. He gilded vice and defaced virtue. He identified goodness with stupidity and constancy with boredom. He persuaded us to admire the rake and to envy the courtesan. For a time he restored the Restoration and resurrected the tradition of Congreve. His glittering immorality dazzled us with its coruscations of wit. But the comedy of Wilde died like the comedy of Congreve. "How do you like the revival of *A Woman of No Importance*?" said a friend to me as I left His Majesty's. "It is not a revival," said I, "it is an exhumation." And I recalled Thackeray's passage about the comedy of Congreve. My feelings were like those of Thackeray at Pompeii, "looking at Sallust's house and the relics of an orgy—a dried wine-jar or two, a charred supper-table, the breast of a dancing-girl pressed against the ashes, the laughing skull of a jester, a perfect stillness round about, as the cicerone twangs his moral, and the blue sky shines calmly over the ruin." Yes, the Wilde muse is dead, and "her song choked in Time's ashes. We gaze at the skeleton, and wonder at the life which once revelled in its mad veins. We take the skull up, and muse over the frolic and the daring, the wit, scorn, passion, hope, desire, with which that empty bowl once fermented. We think of the glances that allured, the tears, that melted; of the bright eyes that shone in those vacant sockets, and of lips whispering love and cheeks dimpling with smiles that once covered yon ghastly framework. They used to call those teeth pearls once. See: there's the cup she drank from, the gold chain she wore on her neck, the vase which held the rouge for her cheeks, her looking-glass, and the harp she used to dance to. Instead of a feast we find a grave-stone, and in place of a mistress a few bones!" Wilde is to-day as mouldily antiquated as Congreve.



### The Hero Turns Villain.

THE alchemy of time turns villains into heroes and heroes into villains. Shylock was a villain to the Elizabethan playgoer. He is a hero to us. There has been a shifting of the centre of our imaginative sympathy. In the time of Shakespeare the Jew was a spitting-stock. In our time the Jew is a martyr and a hero. The alteration in our point of view has been produced partly by the great wave of humanitarian passion that swept over England in the nineteenth century, and partly by the political genius of Disraeli. He wrenched English sentiment right round. If France had been governed for a generation by a Disraeli, she too would have sloughed her Anti-Semitic intolerance, and the Dreyfus infamy would have been impossible. It is interesting to trace in the dramatic imagination of Shakespeare a movement of sympathy which forestalled and foreshadowed the movement of sympathy produced by Disraeli in the imagination of the English people. I have been reading Mr. Watts-Dunton's introduction to *The Merchant of Venice* in the American "Renaissance" edition of Shakespeare, published by Mr. George D. Sproul in New York. He points out that at the opening of the play

of hearing Mr. Wilde's literary executor consent to the alteration of Salome's name to Mary Ann and Herod's to Harrods."

Shylock is simply Marlowe's Barabas. The opening scenes are charged with anti-semitism, but as the play goes on Shakespeare makes Shylock the representative of a great race wronged. He shows the spectator a cruelty greater than Shylock's cruelty, the cruelty of the race to which his persecuting bondman belonged. "When I saw this play at Drury Lane," said Heine, speaking of Kean's impersonation, "there stood behind me in the box a fair, pale Briton, who, at the end of the fourth act, fell a-weeping passionately, several times exclaiming, 'The poor man is wronged!'" Just as imaginative sympathy wrought a change in the attitude of Shakespeare, and in that of the English people towards the Jews, so imaginative sympathy has wrought a change in our attitude towards the homely qualities at which Wilde sneered. Lord Illingworth was a hero at the Haymarket: he is a villain at His Majesty's. Mr. Tree's subtle portrait of the brilliant blackguard arouses the admiration of disgust, not the admiration of envy. We pity him as heartily as we pity Shylock; but our pity is mixed with contempt.



### I Believe in Man.

THE decay of cynicism is associated with a great renaissance of faith in human nature. We feel that Illingworth is a literary monster, and not a real man. His inhuman depravity does not shock us, because it does not deceive us. We do not take it seriously, just as we do not take the inhuman depravity of Shylock seriously. Illingworth, indeed, has become a burlesque of Wilde. He has become a satire on Wilde; just as Wilde himself became a satire on cynicism. We see only the seamy side of the wit. The cynic wears badly. Abstract vice is more tiresome than abstract virtue. It is not possible to make life as rapturous as the lyric of a lark, but at least we can enjoy the sunlight without filtering it through the dirty windows. The art of happiness is not the art of exasperated sensations, but the art of simplified sincerities. The tragedy of the cynic is his baffled attempt to escape from life by outraging it, to achieve immortality by committing suicide. The really original wit is the wit that satirises the sensualist and ridicules the voluptuary. It is an old-fashioned superstition to imagine that sin is amusing. When Wilde says that a saint is a man with a past and a sinner is a man with a future, he inverts the truth. The man who is indentured to his appetites is a slave who can never be expatriated. It is bad to serve a tyrant who is outside you; it is worse to serve a tyrant who is inside you. You may kill the one; the other will kill you.



### The Sparkling City.

THE modern note is sympathy with every phase of life. "Give us the necessities," we cry, "and we can do without the luxuries." I am a firm believer in the ability of human beings to be happy. I am sure that most of us are happier than our friends think we are. Husbands and wives love each other more devotedly than we suspect. Marriage in nine cases out of ten is a gilt-edged stock, and not a rotten company. It begins with romance and ends in comradeship—two of the best things in the world. The happiest man is the married veteran. The unhappiest man is the lonely voluptuary who labours wearily towards his distant grave:—

He seems as one whose footsteps halt,  
Toiling in immeasurable sand,  
And o'er a weary, sultry land,  
Far beneath a blazing vault,  
Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,  
The city sparkles like a grain of salt.

That is why I call Wilde the last of the cynics. But I like to remember that he had glimpses of the sparkling city, brief visions of its simple human splendours and its common human glories,—unselfish love, tender self-sacrifice, vigilant sympathy, reverence and compassion, and fierce fidelity. He too was human in his weaker moods, though he was not strong enough to be triumphantly weak. It takes a strong man to yield humbly to his own higher instincts and to cower abjectly before his own conscience.

JAMES DOUGLAS.

"M.A.P." readers should not fail to order Next Week's Number in advance, as there is sure to be a huge demand. In that issue

## MISS ELLEN TERRY

begins

### Her Life Story.

Do not forget. Out next Thursday, June 6

## M. A. P. IN SOCIETY.

### A Royal "Handy-Man."

PRINCE ARTHUR OF CONNAUGHT, who represented King Edward at the christening of the Prince of Asturias, and who had the honour of being chosen to reply at the State banquet for all the foreign princes assembled in Madrid, has been aptly called the "handy-man" of the Royal Family. He is only twenty-four, but already he has represented his Majesty at a remarkable number of important State ceremonies, such as the christening of the little Italian Crown Prince, and that of the son and heir of the German Crown Prince, as well as at a number of Royal funerals. Most important of all in a political sense was his visit to Japan to invest the Mikado with the Order of the Garter—the visit which Prince Fushimi has just been returning.



### An Eligible Royal Bachelor.

PRINCE ARTHUR, who is regarded with feelings of special affection by King Edward, is certainly one of the most eligible of Royal bachelors, and the question of his marriage is one of deep interest, not only to his Royal kinsfolk, but also to the whole nation. It would not, perhaps, be surprising if he were to woo and win a Princess of the Imperial House of Russia, with which our own Royal Family has already such close links. His name was associated, some time ago, with the pretty and brilliantly gifted daughter of a great British duke. The Prince goes a great deal into general society, he is fond of dancing, and is a fine horseman. His most intimate man friend is young Lord Hastings, with whom, in the latter's bachelor days, he shared a house at Norwich.



### Assassins of Royalty.

THE recent diabolical plot to murder the Tsar and the infant Cesarewitch by means of two tiny infernal machines, the size of watches, reminds us that Royal personages, as well as heads of Republics, are in constant danger of such attempts. It is said, indeed, that they become fatalists as the only way of preserving their peace of mind. King Humbert of Italy always had a startled expression in his eyes from the day that he escaped almost unhurt from Passanti's dagger at Naples until he was shot by Bresci more than twenty years later. King Edward's life has only been attempted once—by Sipido at Brussels—but Queen Victoria suffered five attacks, all by shooting. It is a curious fact that, on the whole, Presidents have been quite as often the object of attacks as Monarchs. Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley, of the United States, were all murdered, as was also President Carnot, while one has quite lost count of the number of South American Presidents who have been "removed."

## AT THE PLAY.

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

If "A Woman of No Importance" had ended with its third act there would have been very little doubt about the success of its revival at His Majesty's on Wednesday evening. It may have been that as some have told us the story of Mrs. Arbuthnot, her illegitimate son, and his gracefully worthless father had worn rather thin and seemed more than a trifle insincere. But the sentimental interest of the piece was never its strong point, and what was best in Wilde's work had remained, up to the point which we have mentioned, as irresistible as ever. It is all very well to sneer at a trick of dialogue which any theatrical hack could imitate—with a difference—as soon as Wilde had invented the original for him to copy. What one would like to see pointed out is the playwright who, since the premature passing of the brilliant author of "Lady Windermere's Fan" and "A Woman of No Importance," has attained in his dialogue such literary ease and finish of diction, such grace of wit and such perfection of phrasing. It is not as though there were nothing in it all, except that invention of the inverted epigram which is made so characteristic as well as so effective in the cynically smiling mouths of Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Allenby. There are quick light touches of profound feeling, not only for the unhappy Mrs. Arbuthnot, but for the light-hearted voluptuary to whom she owes her unhappiness. There is poetry behind and beneath the prose: there is the soft light of real human, very human, feeling as well as the dazzling glitter from artificial sallies of self-conscious humour. The charm of the style has survived if the substance is now found to have lost some of the little vitality which it once possessed.

These things being so, it was particularly unfortunate that on the first night of the revival Mr. Tree's obvious difficulty over the words of a part for which 14 years ago he proved himself admirably fitted caused the performance to drag exactly where alert assurance was most needed in order to gloss over the admitted weaknesses of the play itself. Thus, through hesitation of handling, all the defects of the last act were so emphasised as to destroy the delightful influence of what had gone before. No Lord Illingworth could look or pose the part better than did Mr. Tree's. No Mrs. Arbuthnot could well be more gracious or tender or gravely pathetic than was Miss Marion Terry's. But in their scenes together, especially at the close of the second act, and throughout the great difficulties of the fourth, they seemed so uncertain of one another that they dared nothing beyond a mere sketch of their excellent intentions. Hence the play was let down just where it most needed keeping up. When Mr. Tree is at his own best his revival will gain immensely in its chances of lasting favour.

For the rest, the cast secured is, on the whole, very good indeed. Nothing could well be happier than the selection of Miss Ellis Jeffreys for Mrs. Allenby. Her conversational brightness has the true note of fashionable "smartness," and her reckless epigrams seem to fit her as well as does her glittering gown. Mrs. Charles Calvert is exquisitely funny in the amiable commonplaces of Lady Hunstanton, and so also is Mr. Maurice in the breezy clerical optimism of the Archdeacon, who is so cheerfully sympathetic in his references to his invalid wife. The young couple are embodied pleasantly enough by Miss Viola Tree and Mr. Charles Quartermaine, though without any adequate sense of character in the one case or of comedy restraint in the other. Miss Kate Cutler and Miss Kate Bishop act smoothly and neatly and Mr. Allan repeats a former success. The revival is beautifully mounted and gains in drawing-room effectiveness from the new device by which Mr. Tree can now diminish the apparent size of his line stage.