

OUR LONDON LETTER.

LONDON, February, 1891.

The success of the Military Exhibition, held last summer at Chelsea has encouraged the promoters to commence the organization of a Naval Exhibition on the same lines, to be held in the same place. The idea originated with the Prince of Wales, who is the Hon. Admiral of the Fleet, and the Queen will be one of the patrons and will lend a large number of interesting exhibits from her private collection. One of the most interesting exhibits will be a large working model of the "Victory," of the same size as the original, and which will cost £4,000. The greater part of the ship will be an exact representation of the "Victory" as she went into action at the Battle of Trafalgar, and she will be manned by trained crews from Sheerness. It was first proposed that the original "Victory" should be brought round from Portsmouth, but it was found that not only would she be unable to stand, in her present mutilated condition, the sea voyage, but also the Thames bridges would be insuperable objections. Another object of interest will be a huge working model of a turret-ship, which is being constructed at a cost of £5,000. There will also be a large model, 170 feet high, of a light-house, which will be fitted with hydraulic lifts to carry people to the top, where they will be initiated into the mysteries of the search and revolving lights. It is estimated that the guarantee fund already reaches £50,000.

There have been two important theatrical novelties during the past week. Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's "Woodbarrow Farm" has been placed in the evening bill of the Vaudeville Theatre—which has been redecorated and rebuilt—and has achieved a great success. It is, without doubt, the best piece of work that Mr. Jerome has yet done, dealing, as it does, with country life in an idyllic and charming manner. The company includes Mr. Thomas Thorne, the lessee and manager, Mr. Bernard Gould, the clever young artist-actor and Miss Vane.

The other novelty is the production of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones' new play, "The Dancing Girl," at the Haymarket Theatre. The play was an immediate and a deserved success, and the critics, one and all, speak of it as Mr. Jones' greatest and most successful work—a work which marks a new era in the history of the British stage. Unconventional in treatment and marked with a great gift of literary expression, "The Dancing Girl" is sure to draw all London—at least that portion of it which believes in the mission of the Drama to exalt not just to provide an entertainment which will pass away a few hours. The play deals with the two opposites of life, Quakerism and Bohemianism. A beautiful girl, brought up with the greatest strictness by her Puritan parents in Cornwall, is sent to London to earn her living in service. But the change of life is too great, she loses her head and becomes the mistress of the Duke of Guisebury, the owner of the island in which her parents live. Occasionally she goes back to visit them, dressing herself in the Puritan garb and allowing them to think that she is in a good situation in London. The plot is too long and too complicated to give here in its fulness, but it is intensely interesting and held the audience from beginning to end. Mr. Beerbohm Tree, although he had the managerial cares of a first night upon him, acted with wonderful cleverness and finish as the dissolute duke. Miss Julia Neilson as the Quaker maiden who relapses into ways of wickedness, acted with a force and 'go' which surprised everyone. The company included Mr. Fred Terry, Mr. James Fernandez and Miss Rose Norreys.

Mr. Oscar Wilde's novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," which attracted such a large amount of attention when published last summer in *Lippincott's Magazine*, on account of its originality and boldness of treatment, is about to be published in book-form.

"Ivanhoe" has been produced and has been hailed on every hand as a perfect grand opera both in its music (by Sir Arthur Sullivan) and its libretto (by Mr. Julian Sturgis). Of course there have been dissentient voices, and there are signs of a reaction and of a latent feeling that, perhaps, the first night criticisms were a little too hasty and a little too audacious, but then it is not everyone who dares (or is able)

to criticize seriously Sir Arthur Sullivan. The musical critic of the *World*, (Mr. George Bernard Shaw, the Socialist) however, pitches into the opera with the greatest courage. He says that neither composer or librettist have treated Sir Walter Scott fairly. Why, he asks, has not Sir Arthur done for Scott what he did for Mr. W. S. Gilbert in "Patience" and its forerunners? He says the composer has failed to reproduce in music the vivid characterization of Scott, and he says that he has treated the majority of the characters as if they were mere personages from the savory comic operas and that a number of the songs are mere paraphrases from the same source. Of Mr. Julian Sturgis, Mr. Bernard Shaw says that "he has gutted the story of every poetic and humorous speech it contains," and he protests against "a Royal English Opera which begins by handing over a literary masterpiece for wanton debasement at the hand of a journeyman hired for the job." If it was anyone else who had written all this very little attention would have been paid to it, but Mr. George Bernard Shaw has the reputation of being one of the best musical critics, and his criticism in the *World* is exciting a great deal of attention and has been setting people asking whether "Ivanhoe" is really such a great work and such a classic as was first stated.

There is a club in London (started two or three years ago) called the "Play-goers Club," which is gradually becoming a power in the theatrical world and which is getting itself hated by both actors and managers alike. Enthusiastic theatre-goers are its members, who turn up on first nights in great force, and a play has, to a large extent, to stand or fall by their judgment, for they have the courage of their convictions, and when they don't like a play they hiss vigorously—and when the play begins to hiss it is all up with the play. It is only fair to say, however, that they use their power sparingly. All the members of the club call themselves earnest students of the drama, and debates on all burning questions touching on dramatic art are held from time to time, and papers have been read by such well-known men as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. A. W. Pinero, Mr. Jerome K. Jerome and Mr. Sydney Grundy. If anyone wants to know anything of the progress of the theatre here in England he should get the first number of their organ, *The Play-goer's Review*, all the articles being outspoken and to the point.

The mountain has laboured and has brought forth a mouse. After all the fuss and talk the first number of *Black and White* is very poor, the letter-press being purposeless and, except in one or two cases, utterly beneath contempt. The illustrations, too, may be very artistic and splendidly engraved, but they are not living, not on the nail, so to speak. The public, who buy sixpenny newspapers, want something very much up to date, not simply reproductions of old masters. Of course all allowances must be made for it being a first number; but really it will have to be vastly improved in every respect if it is to sell and give any return for the huge capital said to be sunk in it. As a rival to the *Illustrated London News* it is simply nowhere.

Mr. W. T. Stead, resting for a moment from his labours on the *Review of Reviews*, has found time to write a short article on "How to Become a Journalist" in the current number of *The Young Man*. He, of course, advises everyone to learn shorthand, German and French and the typewriter, and he advises none to take to journalism as a man takes to shop-keeping or a woman to dressmaking. No man, he says, can be a successful journalist who cannot feel intensely and who is not sympathetic. The more you can feel, the more you can take a real and fervent interest in, the better you will get on. The journalist, he says, is the eye of the people, and it is better that he should be sympathetic than crammed with learning and a gigantic intellect. "Dry-as-dust may be a very good fellow in his library, but he is out of place in the editorial sanctum." Every aspiring journalist should read the article, for it is cram-full of common sense and it gives just the information most required.

GRANT RICHARDS.

Poetry.

In Memoriam.

(E. E. F., DIED OCTOBER 21ST, 1890.)

To earth hath fall'n the last pale, quiv'ring leaf,
And all the Autumn trees, so dark and bare,
Pulsing in every limb with some sharp grief,
Moan out their sadness on the sunless air.

Cold, cold the days when all the leaves are dead,
Deep buried under silent drifts of snow,
And when from life, Hope's presence fair is fled,
Cold, cold the days the broken heart must know.

In Spring, they say, this sadness will depart,
And Life, once more, with bloom will bless the world,
But Spring dawns not upon the broken heart,
Whence Hope, in Autumn days, is ruthless hurled.

No, Hope is dead, like yonder perished leaf,
Now, as the cov'ring snows of Winter fall,
So, let the storms of unavailing grief
Bury dead Hope, and pile her funeral pall.

With tears and prayers and thoughts remorseful, mad,
Of this that is—and that which might have been,
Of all the glorious scope that life once had,
Now prisoned narrowing walls of pain between.

But, can it be, those wild, unworded prayers
Have won an answer from beyond the bound
Of dull-eyed Grief?—the breath of evening bears
A voice of tender yet triumphant sound.

Hope cannot die like to the withered leaf
That, falling, finds its end upon the sod,
For Hope, ev'n midst the agonies of grief
Sees still Faith's finger pointing up to God!

He took life's burden from the faithful hands,
And homeward did the world-worn spirit bring
The weary feet that trod these Autumn lands,
Found their glad rest in Heaven's Eternal Spring.

—HELEN FAIRBAIRN.

Montreal, November, 1890.

Joe Birse, the Engineer.

(See Vol. V., pages 388, 396 and 397.)

Have we not still our heroes
With pulses strong and true—
Still, in life's stress and conflict,
Ready to dare and do?
Let all who hold true manhood
And knightly courage dear,
Do honour to the hero,
Joe Birse, the engineer.

The train sweeps through the darkness
Its precious freight of lives,
Of fathers, mothers, brothers,
Of sisters, husbands, wives,
Straight to the cold black river,
None dream of danger near,
None see the deadly peril
Save Joe,—the engineer.

O'er the white flying snow wreaths
The headlight throws its glare
On to that awful blackness,
That gulf of dark despair!
Swift speeds the panting engine
With fiery throbbing breath
Defying brake and throttle
It dashes on to death!

Oh, hearts and homes awaiting
Those husbands, fathers, wives,—
Must the dark river swallow
That treasure of dear lives?
Does he think,—in the quiver
Of nerves at utmost strain,
Of one home that is waiting
For him—and waits in vain!

No time to pause or question,
One impulse is in his breast,
If power of man can do it
That he must save the rest!
With one tremendous shudder
The train stops—short and sheer—
But on still darts the engine,
God help the engineer!

God help him? Nay! he called him
To win life's noblest crown,
As in the cold dark water,
He went unflinching down!
What better than to follow
Where Love Divine hath trod
Himself to give, for brother-man,
Then—through the dark—to God!

—AGNES M. MACHAR.