



IN STAGELAND.

BY HECTOR CHARLESWORTH.

THE beginning of a new year is a retrospective season with all of us. We are theoretically supposed to guide our futures by a consideration of our deeds and errors in the past. In looking over the playbills of a twelve-month it is difficult to find anything on which to construct a programme for our future well-being. The ordinary routine of travelling companies, some good, some bad, has continued after the same old fashion. As was pointed out in these columns some time ago, there has been a noticeable swinging of the pendulum toward vaudeville, but we look to the future for a backward oscillation to better things.

To us playgoers in the provinces perhaps the most noteworthy episode of the year has been the fact that within its cycle we have had two visits from the English manager John Hare. Mr. Hare presents plays dealing with the domestic life of England, and it is noteworthy that by dint of dressing his scenes realistically and drilling his subordinates in natural methods he has succeeded in imparting to his stage an atmosphere of home as potent as the atmosphere of poetry and romance which Henry Irving so beautifully creates. If there should ever come a day when the taste of the community shall have so far advanced that it will demand an endowed theatre of its own in which the drama may become something more than a vagabond wanderer at the mercy of gamblers, we can look to Mr. Hare as a man who has carried on an educative campaign in grace and refinement among us. The waning year brought to us also Mr. Arthur Bouchier's organization from the London Royalty theatre, which also assists in forming a public standard in acting graceful production.

It is a sorry truth, however, that these fair attractions are too few. The intellectual community is tempted forth to take a genial interest in the playhouse for a little while and then the old routine of bad and indifferent productions resumes its sway and the drama is once more a thing of rags and patches.

The twelvemonth seems to me particularly poverty-stricken in memories of good plays. There may have been some brilliant dramas produced in the great metropolitan centres which

lacked that note of popularity that would induce a manager to try his luck upon the road with them.

The short and poorly patronized engagement of Minnie Mad-dern Fiske is to me the most interesting memory of the month gone by. To me it seems that this little

artiste possesses elements of distinction, intellect, insight and expression unsurpassed by an English speaking actress. Two plays of hers by two very eminent authors, "The Queen of Liars," by Alphonse Daudet, and "The Doll's House," by Henrik Ibsen, received interpretations at her hands sufficient to rouse memories that will never die. Her methods seem peculiarly adapted to express the unrest and nervous activity typical of the women of this generation. Women have rebelled against the old conventions which considered them as ideal, yet helpless things; they ask men to treat them as individuals on a plane

of equality. To think of them as they are and not as fancy pictures them. Mrs. Fiske shows us woman idealized, a thinking breathing creature, with hopes and nerves and aspirations; woman with her tinsel stripped away, and yet more winning in her genuine femininity. By virtue of the fact that she seeks cool incisive truth in her acting methods, not flutulent, gushing fables, she ranks also as an educative force of the first quality.

I had almost forgotten Bernhardt, who also came to us with two glorious productions of the French drama. But, as she is exotic to our stage, she hardly comes into the same class with actors, who in language and education are flesh of our English-speaking flesh. Her representation of the accepted ideal of the Magdalen in the Hindu drama "Izeyl" was as beautiful and poetic a thing as the stage will show us in many a long day, and the romantic qualities of Sara's art—her poses, her personality, her diction—mellow, rhythmical in all things, had a very full expression; albeit she did lack the higher spiritual qualities of a religious convert.

The movement for romantic and picturesque productions found its chief exponents in such excellent performers as Mrs. Potter and Kyrie Bellew, and Mr. E. H. Sothorn. The former couple presented a very striking production of a rather gloomy tragedy "Charlotte Corday," an old piece, of French origin. The girl assassin, as presented by Mrs. Potter, had a high spiritual quality that was more effective than even her dramatic fervor. I, some months ago, ventured a summary of Mrs. Potter's powers, in the statement that she was a woman of genius rather than talent. Because, while she has difficulties of expression she will never get the better of, the temperamental qualities she possesses are unequalled by any other English speaking actress. Like Bernhardt, she belongs wholly to the romantic drama, and with her complex individuality, you could not imagine her capable of such simplicity as Mrs. Fiske's.

Mr. Sothorn's romantic production of "The Prisoner of Zenda," was also rich in picturesque qualities, and while there seems to be an essential modernity about this young actor, he has shown us that he

can embark on a reactionary venture with grace and distinction. At the present time the movement toward romance and melodrama, seems to be on the wane, and a brief season will see work of the modern atmosphere to the front again, despite the many fascinations of sock and buskin, silk and satin.

Turning to the stage of the world at large, apart from our own local outlook, the year 1896 seems to have been uneventful. No new star seems to have come to the fore to dazzle the world. Richard Mansfield, Beerholm Tree, E. S. Willard, not to mention the incomparable Irving, still remain the illuminating figures of the drama, and no new actor has sprung up to rival them. In a subordinate capacity, the Canadian genius has come to the fore in London, by an amazing performance of the Emperor Nero in the "Sign of the Cross." Mrs. Julia Marlow Taber still remains the one ideally poetic artist of the American stage, nor, so far as I can learn, has any English artist sprung up to claim the similar laurels of Miss Ellen Terry. Miss Ada Rehan is still the most artistic of English speaking comedienne, and is to essay Beatrice in "Much Ado about Nothing" as a New Year's essay. Mrs. Kendal has hardly been heard of in recent annals, and another actress who promised wondrous things, Miss Olga Nethersole, has allowed ultra-sensational methods to place her temporarily under a cloud. A familiar New York actress, of charming methods, Miss Georgia Cayvan, has recently tried her luck as a star. Another, Miss Rose Coghlan, has met with dire misfortune. In addition, three of the most famous leading men of the American stage, Wilton Lackaye, Maurice Barrymore and Henry Miller, have likewise achieved astral opportunities. E. J. Henley and Chas. Coghlan, two of the most accomplished actors who ever trod the boards, have fallen into oblivion.

Death, too, has been at work with no light hand among the people of the stage, and we are poorer by the departure to an unknown bourne of several delightful actors. The most recent misfortune was the death, in Italy, of the younger Salvini, by long odds the finest romantic actor on the American stage. He was a man of vast abilities, tremendous physical power, and a rarely attractive individuality. He was the only Hamlet recently seen on the boards which at any point reached absolute greatness.

By the death of Augustin Daly's comedian, Jas. Lewis, the American stage likewise sustained an irreparable loss. Never in recent times had Shakespeare's "clowns" such an interpreter. Dry, incisive, eternally genial and fanciful by temperament, he could create an atmosphere of attic mirth that made one think of how the old jesters of the Mermaid Inn would have relished him. To have seen his Bottom, his Touchstone, his Sir Toby Belch, was to receive an impression of the divinely evasive humor of Shakespeare, which renders all his comedies more interesting for the future. Alas, poor Yorick!

Frank Mayo, one of the sweetest and most pervasive of comedians, gracious, gentle, always artistic like Mr. Lewis passed suddenly away, let us hope to a land as sunny as their mirth. In his old age he left one lasting memorial of gentle comedy, "Pudd'nhead Wilson," and his place too will long remain vacant. Mrs. Scott-Siddons, also once a popular favorite, and Henry Howe, the oldest actor on the stage, so often seen here with Henry Irving, are likewise gone. So shifts the year's kaleidoscope in the struggling practical world and the tinsel fantastic.

A little joy to match the sorrow
of each day's sowing, and so—
Good morrow.

