

THE BAR.

Why call it a bar? Say whence is derived
This name for a depot of spirits of evil?
Was the name by some sly friend of virtue con-
trived,
Or like the thing named, did it come from the
devil?

I'll tell you its meaning—'tis a bar to all good,
And a constant promoter of everything evil:
'Tis a bar to all virtue—that's well understood—
A bar to the right and a door for the devil.

'Tis a bar to all industry, prudence and wealth,
A bar to reflection, a bar to sobriety,
A bar to clear thought and a bar to sound health,
A bar to good conscience, to prayer and to
piety.

A bar to the sending of children to school,
To clothing and giving them good education;
A bar to observance of every good rule,
A bar to the welfare of family and nation.

A bar to the hallowed enjoyment of home,
A bar to the holiest earthly fruition;
A bar that forbids its frequenters to come
To the goal and rewards of a virtuous ambition.

A bar to integrity, honor and fame,
To friendship and peace and connubial love,
To the purest delights that on earth we may
claim,
A bar to salvation and Heaven above!
—Selected.

THE THEATRE QUESTION.

A favorite mode of meeting objections to the modern theatre is by the rejoinder that the objector, in the pulpit or the editorial chair, is not himself a theatre-goer, and therefore is incompetent to pass upon the moral measure of that with which he is personally unfamiliar. Waiving the question of the real force of such an objection in this case, it will be admitted by all that the testimony of the best dramatic critics, of prominent theatre managers, and of veteran actors, cannot fairly be called unintelligent or hostile criticism of the theatrical profession. And such testimony is of itself more than sufficient to put the theatre of to-day in a light—or in a shadow—that might well cause a pure and sensitive mind to recoil from any unnecessary association with it.

When, not long ago, Mr. Clement Scott, a leading theatrical critic of London, was asked to give to the public his matured views of the stage as a place for a pur-minded girl to seek a livelihood and to pursue dramatic art, his answer was: "A woman may take a header into a whirlpool, and be miraculously saved,—but then, she may be drowned. If a girl knows how to take care of herself she can go anywhere; I should be sorry to expose modesty to the shock of that worst kind of temptation, a frivolous disregard of womanly purity. One out of a hundred may be safe; but then she must hear things that she had better not listen to, and witness things that she had better not see. In every class of life women are exposed to danger and temptations, but far more in the theatre than elsewhere. All honor and praise to them when they brave them out." That view of the case, by a trained observer, would hardly encourage a lover of his fellows to give any more encouragement to a profession with such exceptional risks in it than he was compelled to.

When, at a prior date, the *North American Review* had a symposium on "The Moral Influence of the Drama," three such experts in the theatrical profession as Mr. John Gilbert the actor, Mr. William Winter the critic, and Mr. A. M. Palmer, the manager, bore important witness to facts which ought to have weight in the decision on the entire merits of the question under discussion. Mr. Gilbert began his paper with these words: "I believe the present condition of the drama, both from a moral and an artistic point of view, to be a subject for regret. A large number of our theatres are managed by speculators who have no love for true art, and who, in the production of 'attractions,' consider only the question of dollars and cents. With that class it seems to matter little whether a play has any literary merit; it is sufficient if it is 'sensational' and full of 'startling situations.' Many of the plays that have been adapted from the French are open to the severest criticism on the ground of immorality. I say as an actor, without any hesitation, that such plays have a very bad influence on nearly all people, especially on the young. Some argue that,

even in these productions, vice is punished in the end; but when a whole play is filled with amorous intrigue, and fairly bristles with conjugal infidelity, when, in short, all the characters are infamous, there is no question in my mind but that its influence is bad." Be it remembered, these are the words of a veteran actor, not of a poorly informed preacher!

Mr. Palmer, while of the opinion that, as a whole, the theatre of to-day is a decided improvement over that of former days, seems to agree with Mr. Gilbert in the idea that the plays now in vogue are inferior to those of a former generation. While "the French authors write the best plays," and Victorien Sardou is "the greatest dramatist of our age," it is still true that "the most competent critics pronounce the French of Dumas and Sardou as vastly inferior to that of Voltaire and the writers of the time of Louis XV." "Perhaps," said Mr. Palmer, suggestively, "the cause of this decadence is to be found in the public taste."

As to the subject-matter of modern plays generally Mr. Palmer affirmed:—"The chief themes of the theatre are now, as they have ever been, the passions of men. Ambition leading to murder; jealousy leading to murder; lust leading to adultery and to death; anger leading to madness." And, in explanation of this fact, Mr. Winter added: "Christian ethics on the stage would be as inappropriate as Mr. Owen's 'Solon Shingle' in the pulpit. . . . The worst mistake ever made by the stage, and the most offensive attitude ever assumed by it, are seen when—as in 'Camille' and two or three similar plays—it tries to deal with what is really the function of the church, the consequences of sin in the human soul. And here it makes a disastrous and mournful failure."

There certainly is no need of any fancy sketch, on the part of men who are not theatre-goers, in order to make a case against the modern theatre, when such admissions as these are made by those who are attempting its formal defence. A seeker of instruction would have to be pretty badly off who went to the theatre to learn lessons of godliness or personal purity, if what such experts as these have to say about it be accepted as true.

An excellent illustration of the modern theatre in one of its higher phases, as viewed from the standpoint of the better class of the theatre-goers on the one hand, and of the skilled dramatic critic on the other hand, is furnished in the record of a recent visit to Philadelphia by Madame Sara Bernhardt, to perform the chief part in Sardou's "La Tosca," at the Chestnut street Opera House. Madame Bernhardt is no commonplace performer, but she is called "the most effective emotional actress in the world," "indisputably mistress" in the art of tragedy, a "genius" in her professional realm. Hence many who would draw a sharp line between poor acting and good, feel called on to witness the performance of such an artist as this.

According to the reports of the most trustworthy daily papers of the city, the large audience which greeted the eminent artist "represented the most thoughtful and the sincerest admirers of the play" in Philadelphia. "But out of deference to the penitential season (it being Holy Week) they had, for the most part, avoided the garb and demeanor of fashion." It was no rabble that was present, but rather the intelligent and the conscientious believers in "the co-work of the pulpit and the stage" for the elevation of the morals of the community.

The play itself is characterized by the discriminating dramatic critic of the *Public Ledger* as a "monstrous conglomeration of horrors, of vilenesses." The critic of the *Record* says that it "is especially open to objection because of its sheer and unceasing brutality." "Physical agony and elemental passion are presented with brutal bluntness in a series of rudimentally contrived situations," is the way it appears to the *Press* critic. The *Inquirer's* critic speaks of it as "a mawkish, miserable tale, told with revolting realism." These hints from professional observers are sufficient to give to an outsider a tolerably correct idea of the play as a whole, without the trouble of going to see it, in order to measure its moral worth.

But the fact that the play itself is a "monstrous conglomeration of horrors, of

vilenesses," is by no means a reason for its exclusion from the stage, in the opinion of the careful critic of the *Ledger* who thus characterizes it. He even insists that, "the worse the play—and what play could, all things being considered, be worse?—the greater the triumph of the actress, who, having material so repulsive to work with, so deftly, with art so consummate, shaped and formed it as to make the spectator see in it only elements of sentiment, emotion, passion, which humanized, almost ennobled, even that which was most repellent in it." According to the *Press* critic, the prevailing affection of the heroine of the play is "her fleshly love,—a fleshiness that Madame Bernhardt in some ineffable way exalts." What a help to a pure-minded young girl it must be to have gross "fleshly love" exalted in some ineffable way before her observant eyes!

If, indeed, it be true, as the critics seem to think, that the worse the play the greater the triumph of the actor in rendering it bearable to a decent spectator, would it not be well to have the story of "Jack the Ripper" dramatized for some star tragedian, who might have the genius to humanize, and almost ennoble, the doings of the famous Whitechapel artist? It would seem possible to make even a more "monstrous conglomeration of horrors, of vilenesses," out of the story than Sardou has yet produced. If the "fleshly love" of the hero in this new play were "in some ineffable way" exalted by the actor for the benefit of young men who attend the theatre as a means of liberal education, what a gain there would be to the community! There is time for this work between now and next year's Holy Week.

The manner in which Madame Bernhardt's rendering of Sardou's play impressed itself for the evening upon different classes of persons is indicated by the *Inquirer's* report of comments heard at the close of the remarkable performance: "'Zounds! but that is a devilish sort of a play. It leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. She is a wonder, though,' he muttered as he strode off to his club to get something to restore his equilibrium. 'Oh dear, wasn't it lovely!' said a West Walnut street young bud, as she sank back into her carriage, and the coachman cracked his whip."

If, according to the unbiased testimony of theatre-critics and theatre-lovers, this be the modern theatre on its higher plane, then let the man who wants to be under such teaching and influences—go to his own place.—*Sunday School Times*.

A SERMONETTE.

BY MARY S. M'COBB.

"Oh, she's my mother's guest."
"No; I needn't trouble myself with her.
She's my sister's company."
Not a bit of it, my dear. Every person who enters the house is in a degree your "company."

Of course I do not mean that if somebody comes to see an especial member of your family you are to intrude you precious self; but if a guest comes to spend several days she belongs to the whole household, every member of which can do something to make the visit pleasant.

Suppose you should take it upon yourself to see that the friend always has a glass of fresh water in her chamber at night; or, if there be no maid to carry it, the pitcher of hot water for her morning bath. An occasional flower laid on her breakfast plate is a very engaging attention; and a boy does not necessarily pull flowers up by the roots, does he?

It would not be thought "good form" to plump one's lazy self into the most comfortable chair when a guest was present, nor to whisk into one's seat at the table when by accident the visitor's chair had not been placed.

But suppose a friend comes merely to pay a short call? The same rules apply, only modified. If you are in the room, of course you will rise with others to receive her. Nothing can be ruder than for any member of the family to continue his reading or his game without pausing to greet whomever may come. If for any reason it be necessary for you to leave the room, a quiet "I am sorry to say that I must ask to be excused" is proper, and allows you to "gang your ain gait."

If your mother be detained in another

room, it is your part to take upon yourself the entertainment of her visitors. If you find it hard to converse, generally the older lady will be ready to speak, and a good listener is one of the rarest and most charming people in the world.

Don't let your eyes go wandering about the room, but look straight at the person who is speaking. Nothing is more annoying than to try to talk to some one who is evidently thinking of something else.

Ten to one you will be thought interesting if you pay marked attention to what your companion says.

Did you never hear of the gentleman who travelled miles and miles with some one whom he declared to be "the most intelligent person" he had ever had the pleasure of meeting and never discovered that his companion, who listened so alluringly, was deaf and dumb?

SINGING AS AN AID TO HEALTH.

The time will soon come when singing will be regarded as one of the great helps to physicians in lung diseases, in their incipient state. Almost every branch of gymnastics is employed in one way or another by the doctors, but the simple and natural function of singing has not yet received its full meed of attention. In Italy, some years ago, statistics were taken which proved that the vocal artists were especially long-lived and healthy, under normal circumstances, while of the brass instrumentalists it was discovered that consumption never claimed a victim among them. Those who have a tendency toward consumption should take easy vocal exercises, no matter how thin and weak their voices may seem to be. They will find a result at times far surpassing any relief afforded by medicine. Vocal practice, in moderation, is the best system of general gymnastics that can be imagined, many muscles being brought into play that would scarcely be suspected of action in connection with so simple a matter as tone production. Therefore, apart from all art considerations, merely as a matter of health, one can earnestly say to the healthy "sing! that you may remain so," and to the weakly "sing, that you may become strong."—*N. Y. Evangelist*.

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