

GROSSMITH ON THE AMERICAN DRAMA.



HE typical American play of the period is something which naturally struck so keen an observer as Mr. George Grossmith the moment after he had "Discovered America." And what an exquisite caricature he gave of it in his entertainment last week! The screams of laughter testified that the satire was not only funny but true. This, indeed, is the secret of Grossmith's success as a burlesquer; there

is always solid truth at the bottom of his jesting. Not even his rare talents would be equal to the task, which cheaper wits often attempt, of depicting grotesque impossibilities and making the delineation really amusing.

"The American play of the period," said the quizzical George, "is a queer mixture of melodrama, farce, tragedy, comedy, music-hall, and a lot of other things. It has a profound pathos in it, and is plentifully supplied with what are called 'specialties.' These are dragged in with a sublime indifference to everything but the very peculiar taste of the public that likes that sort of thing.

There is just one theme for the drama in question. I will briefly outline the story. There is a homestead, which is about to be sold to a railway company, as the projected line is to run through the farm, but the railway is given up, and so the homestead is not sold. That's all. But the theme is worked out in a vast variety of ways.

As the curtain goes up you hear a tuneful refrain—something between a salvation army hymn and a plantation melody, the subject of which seems to be "the shore"—"on the shore," that's how the chorus always ends—"a baby"—or something—"on the shore," I never could catch the words exactly. The air goes like this, you know—and here he thrummed it off on the piano. "Well, the curtain goes up, and discovers *John*, the owner of the homestead, sitting in the middle of the stage with his head hanging down. American actors, by the way, always act with their heads hanging down. English actors, on the other hand, keep their heads up to such an extent that people in the pit never see anything but their necks. Enter *John's* Brother. He goes up to *John* sadly and says—"Don't sell the old homestead." (This in quaveringly pathetic tones.) "Why not?" replies *John*. "Because we've had it so long—nearly twelve years!" says the Brother—"Don't sell the old homestead, *John*!" "I will sell it!" says *John*,



curtly, and then he goes off. His Brother is heart-broken. He comes forward close to the footlights, takes a paper-bag of sand from his pocket, sprinkles it on the stage, tosses aside the bag and then—"Here Grossmith did a jig in the best style of the song-and-dance art. "Then," he resumed, "the Brother goes off, and enter four farm-hands. To them, enter *John*. "Don't sell the old homestead, *John*," they plead. They have been working for him a whole week, and of course address him as *John*. "I will



sell it!" replies *John* again, and again he goes off. The farm hands are now cast down with sorrow, so they step up close to the footlights in a row and then it turns out that they are a quartette party. They sing the touching melody I have just played for you, and go off, after which enter the leading lady, *John's* wife, and her daughter, a sprightly and fetching soubrette in a long pinafore and big straw hat. This character is played by a lady something more than twice the age of her "mother," and her special line of business is posturing as a tom-boy-girl as you've seen her on the bills," and here Grossmith, after a few evolutionary skips *a la* Minnie Palmer, sprawled gracefully and girlishly over the piano, with the toe of one foot poised on the back of a chair.



"We sat upon the Baby on the Shore."
A thing which we had never done before

"The play ends with a tableau in which *John*, surrounded by a very large and heretofore unsuspected family, augmented by the farm-hand quartette, are grouped stiffly in the middle of the stage, and again the melting strains of "on the shore" are wafted over the audience as the curtain descends." The rendering of the quartette, with which the satirist brought his sketch to a close, was funny beyond any description. He is a kindly critic, is Grossmith, and so he refrained from passing any opinion upon the public taste which makes such "dramas" possible, not to say financially successful.

OUR SPECIAL AT OTTAWA.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, OTTAWA,

Press Room, March 28th, 1894.

WELL, they're at it hammer and tongs. That is to say they were until the Easter holidays called a halt and a sudden adjournment. Sir John Thompson has a high reputation as a churchman, and it is passing strange that Easter did not occur to him when he set the date for the meeting of Parliament. Of course it couldn't have occurred to him, because don't you see he is exceedingly anxious to save time and expense. It is a pity, but it can't be helped now. The members are off to their homes—those of them who live within reasonable mileage, that is—and the others are loafing around the corridors of the House or the hotels, discussing the details of the fistic encounter up to date. By this phrase, which I must have picked up from some of the sporty young men in the press gallery, I have reference to the debate on the address, and the few remarks of Devlin, M.P., on McCarthy's bill. The debate on the address was the usual dreary waste of words, with the usual few bits of oasis in it. The speech which attracted most attention was that of Martin, M.P., for Winnipeg. He is a fighter as everybody knows, with a long reach and powerful delivery. (Here I am dropping into prize-ring parlance again. I must keep away from those chaps in the gallery or my pure style will be spoiled.) Joseph had a crow to pick with the Premier for that "yellow Martin" phrase uttered at Antigonish, and polished off the bones of the bird very satisfactorily. That is to say he succeeded in saying several things quite as nasty and quite as full of sense about Sir John Thompson. Furthermore he duly gloated over his election for Winnipeg and as the personification of the Western demand for Tariff Reform, he shook his gory locks at the government—if this Shakespearism may be permitted in the case of a gentleman who keeps his hair so very closely cropped. So much for his maiden speech. There is every indication that he is going