

THE INFLUENCE OF THE STAGE.

Within the past ten years much has been done in this country to raise the social position of the schoolmaster, and at last the man who has successively failed as shoemaker, footman, and railway porter is no longer considered fit to keep a school as a last resource. Society is now turning its attention to the stage, and a feeling is abroad that something should be done to relieve the professors of a branch of art from the obloquy long thrown over them by the vicious utterances of the more intolerant and Puritanical section of pulpit orators. The painter depicts the ideas of the poet upon canvas, the musician externalises upon earth something of the harmony of the spheres, but the art of the actor has a more potent influence upon the public; the fire of life and motion and passion is imported into his representations; he popularises the ideals of the poet in thoughts that breathe and words that burn. As in every other profession under the sun, good and evil are to be found upon the stage; so is it with its censor, the pulpit; the man who frightens his hearers with the false doctrine of eternal punishment, and, poor worm, talks with glib familiarity of the desires and thoughts of the Almighty, is leading as vicious a career as the worst person to be found among actors, and not unfrequently poisons the lives of impressible people by inducing in them a kind of religious mania. A bigoted organisation exists within the Church of England, which is said to consist of an "influential body of clergymen, headed by one of the holiest priests in England," who "have it laid down for them in their rules that they are not to go to the theatre or any other place of known sin." Yet the theatre has behaved with more Christian charity to the pulpit than has the pulpit to the theatre, for it is the legitimate province of the actor to breathe life into the dead pages of history, and to hold up to view the evils of past ages as a lesson and as a warning, nevertheless no auto-da-fé has, so far as we know, ever been represented on the stage, nor roasting at Smithfield in the days of good Queen Bess; indeed such ecclesiastical crimes are too horrible to bear resuscitation.

A "Church and Stage Guild" has been formed by some of the clergy who are ashamed of the past treatment of the stage by their brethren. Presumably within the hallowed shades of this Guild young actresses strive to convince young curates of the beauties of the histrionic art, and young curates attempt to convince young actresses of the truthfulness of the Athanasian Creed. On rare occasions a storm arises to mar the harmony of this earthly paradise. "A Clerical Playgoer" within the Guild recently forsook his colours to attack the stage in the good old fashion, whereupon Miss Ella Dietz came forth with a pamphlet on "The Work of the Actor," a capital essay on the social influence of the stage, and gave the backsliding member the punishment he deserved. Among the interesting subjects discussed at the Guild are the dresses worn in the ballet, though nobody has yet suggested that angels and fairies shall appear in the garb of quakresses and bishops. Why should this not be tried under the auspices of the Church and Stage Guild? All London would flock to see such an advance in ideality and art-culture, such an improvement upon nature.

Conceptions brought down from the ideal world, are placed full of life and power before the public by the actor, making the stage one of the most potent educational engines of the day, consequently it is well to do everything possible to remove the slur thrown over actors by persons worse than themselves, and to take vigorous steps to raise the status of the theatrical profession. The multiplication of small theatres should be encouraged; some of the larger ones are merely gigantic rent-grinding machines, in which, practically speaking, all the receipts are swallowed up by landlords and lawyers, so that those who do the work can scarcely live; better acting and better scenery would be forthcoming were the profits of industry received only by the industrious.

Actors and actresses have finer organisms than the average of mankind, which itself is absolute proof of the ennobling character of the profession; it has been said that "the ideal actor should have the soul of a saint united to the body of an athlete."—*Spiritualist*.

HEAR! HEAR!!

It would seem as if Science had entered the lists against Poetry, resolved to realize every effort of the imagination as a simple and absolute fact. The fiery dragon, which moves at an incredible speed, sending forth flame and cloud, and shaking the very earth, is familiar to us in the steam engine, while the exploit of Ariel in putting a girdle round the earth in forty minutes has been outdone in the wonders of telegraphy. A later realization awaits us in the famous story of the ear of Dionysius. It will be remembered that Dionysius was King of Sicily, and being a tyrant, cruel and oppressive, he was so hated that he went in fear of his life. It did not seem to have occurred to him any more than it has to some tyrants of our day that security would have been gained by ceasing to be cruel and oppressive, and so getting himself beloved. His ingenuity was exhausted in devices to secure safety, and among others, he hit on the idea of a cave in the form of a human ear; this communicated with a room where the tyrant spent the greater part of his time in listening to what

was said of him. The story adds that the workmen engaged in this contrivance were all put to death as soon as it was finished, for fear they should reveal what it was obviously meant for.

The notion that by having a cavern ear-shaped he would be able to hear through its medium better than if it had been of any other shape, was childish enough for a blundering old tyrant to entertain. The outer ear only serves to collect sound, to be conveyed to the wonderful inner organization of which he knew nothing; and any trumpet-mouthed cavity would have answered his purpose as well as a model of a man's ear. However, so the story goes; and now, after many centuries, we get the essential idea of it realized in the invention and application of the Telephone. That is the modern Dionysius' Ear, it performs its functions, but with a power and on a scale which dwarfs the story of the cavern to mere childish conceit. And every day we are getting evidence of the increased powers and possible appliances of this marvellous invention. It was first heard of as a toy. It is already performing most useful and practical functions, while the possibilities of the future invest it with almost miraculous interest.

One most singular instance of the application of this toy has been communicated to the public during the past month of June. It is to be used to secure the reports of the latest sittings of the British Parliament in the newspapers which are served on London breakfast tables. During the last half century gigantic strides have been made in the facilities of placing before the public, news of events in which they are interested, and more especially reports of debates and meetings. In the biographies of persons connected with the press, we see what struggles had to be made to render the newspaper what it is—to change it from the mere chronicler of events, in slight and unimportant paragraphs, to the mirror, and as Shakespeare puts it, "The perfect spy of the time."

William Jerdan has told us how he boarded the ships returning from the first great Arctic expedition, and startled the world by the appearance of the personal narration of the officers in the *Literary Gazette*,—the earliest instance of "interviewing." Dickens, too, has recorded how he attended meetings in all parts of the country, and displayed astounding energy in writing out his notes in vehicles dashing at full speed. This kind of thing was the beginning of a new era in the history of the press, which has since been fostered by legislative enactments, by personal energy, and by improvements in machinery, until it stands almost alone as one of the grandest outcomes of our civilization.

In the struggle for perfection, the *Times* has taken the lead. It has been foremost in enterprise, lavish in money, and unsurpassed in results. And it has now shown us how it is prepared to utilize the new invention—the telephone—in conjunction with yet another novelty—a mechanical type-setting machine—which has been the dream of the century, so as to attain results surpassing anything which has yet been anticipated.

"By means of the machine, in which the types are brought down and placed in position by striking upon keys like those of an organ, a compositor—who, under the ordinary system, can only set up at best fifty lines an hour—can now manage nearly two hundred. To achieve this mechanical result is a great point; but it was found in connection with late debates in the House of Commons that the compositor could not get manuscript fast enough to go on with. He had to lag behind the actual progress of the debate because of the time it took the reporters to transcribe their notes and to transmit them to the office.

Here, then, came the need of an instrument by which there could be verbal transmission—that is to say, means by which the reporter at the House of Commons could speak to the compositor at the *Times* office. The telephone has accomplished this. A wire having been laid down, one telephone is placed at each end of it, and the business goes on in this way:—The notes made by the reporter can be read directly into the telephone receiver in a room adjoining the reporters' gallery, either by the reporter himself or by another person employed for the purpose; and the compositor, at his machine in the office, sits with his ears in juxtaposition with the other terminal of the instrument. The plan which has been found the most efficacious for the purpose of shutting out distracting sounds of other kinds is to place the disc of the telephone above and behind the compositor, and then to arrange two tubes, each with two trumpet-shaped extremities, in such a manner, that these extremities are applied at one end to the two sides of the telephone disc and at the other end to the two ears of the compositor. The compositor is also furnished with a speaking instrument, with a key for ringing a bell, and with a bell which is rung from the House—a simple code of bell signals, consisting of one, two, or three strokes, sufficing for the ordinary requirements of each message. The compositor announces by the bell that he is ready, receives a sentence, strikes the bell to indicate that he understands it, sets up the type with his machine, strikes the bell again for the reader to continue his dictation, and so on until the work is carried as far as time will allow. If there is any doubt or difficulty about the words, a bell signal will cause them to be repeated, or explanations can be sought and received by direct vocal communication. In this power, indeed, resides one of the chief advantages of the method, and one which ought to lead to greater accuracy than has ever previously been attainable. The names of people, places, &c., can be spelt out letter by letter if there is any doubt about them.

These details will interest every one at all curious in such matters, and it will be seen how wonderful is the gain even upon telegraphic communication. But the startling reflection is, that with daily experience and invention, telephonic reporting cannot stop here, and there seems no reason why an astounding stride should not be taken in it even on the present lines.

There is a proposal for a new House of Commons. It is not at present very favourably received; but it may, nevertheless, be assented to before long. Why should not a reward be offered for designs for a Legislative Chamber constructed on telephonic principles? Then, whenever a member rose to