

purpose, is that the system now adopted by the managers of our Toronto theatres is, in more than one respect, a marked improvement on that formerly in vogue. At the Grand Opera House, Mr. Pitou has abolished altogether the old Stock Company, and wisely placed his trust in combinations. In so doing he has, we believe, shown himself fully alive to the conditions of successful management in Toronto. It had become imperative that the stock company should either be vastly improved or altogether abandoned. Toronto theatre-goers had grown more than weary of a system under which the only new thing presented for their delectation was the weekly passage of a single first, or second-rate star through a dull dramatic firmament of fixed rushlight mediocrities. The inevitable re-appearance of 'the old familiar faces,' and the invariable repetition of the old familiar mannerisms in every play, in every conceivable make-up, and under every conceivable circumstance, was beginning to exhaust the patience of even the most enthusiastic *habitués* of the theatre. There have been some very tolerable actors—as well as some very intolerable ones—among the various stock companies Toronto has had; but it would have required phenomenal versatility, such as certainly none of them possessed for them to have assumed satisfactorily all the incongruous rôles, which they were called upon at short notice to prepare. The system was unfair to the 'stars,' it was unfair to the company, and, above all, it was unfair to the public. To have made it otherwise, it would have been necessary to keep on foot a regular company of such first-rate ability as would have ruined the management in salaries, unless there had been developed an enthusiasm for theatre-going as yet unprecedented in Toronto. The alternative which Mr. Pitou has adopted, in bringing to his theatre week after week, a series of 'combinations,' or regularly organized travelling companies, with limited *répertoires*, is one which obviates the most serious of the disadvantages to which we have alluded as connected with the 'stock' system—although it has others of its own. Without dwelling on these at present, it will suffice to say that under this new régime, Toronto audiences will, at all events, have change and variety, such as a city with but two theatres could not otherwise obtain. The various companies visiting us, hav-

ing been organized each with a view to the production of a certain piece or class of pieces, and having played them consecutively a great number of times, may at least be expected to present them with a smoothness and *ensemble* that was always lacking when one company was forced hurriedly to get up numerous fresh plays, and, thus insufficiently prepared, to support a different 'star' every week. In this connection, however, we would strongly protest against a trick, which these travelling companies are frequently guilty of, and which will prejudice the interests of our local managers even more than their own, if it is long continued. We refer to the unaccountable manner in which the approach to Toronto seems to affect the health of the actors and actresses who are advertised for a week before the arrival of the company, and—we are sorry to add, throughout their stay—to play important parts; but who are suddenly taken ill somewhere on the route, leaving their parts to be filled by sorry substitutes, without any apology or announcement being made to the public, before or after the performance. It is the chief drawback to these transitory companies that the public have no guarantee of the fulfilment of their advertised pledges—and no hold upon them in default. Such being the case, it is only right that the managers of our theatres should be held responsible for any small dodges of the kind just referred to, and it is to their interest to look to it that their patrons are protected from anything of the kind.

One thing more, before we enter upon the details of our task. It is much to be regretted that our daily press neglects to exert any influence towards the elevation of the public taste in the dramatic art, by competent or even outspoken criticism. In this respect the *Toronto Evening Telegram* sets a meritorious example to its bigger brothers. The leading dailies—except on very rare occasions—entrust their dramatic criticism to tyros whose 'notices'—couched in an unvarying phraseology which suggests the use of regular forms in blank, filled in with names and dates as required,—are utterly misleading to such of the public as read them, and must be anything but encouraging to actors or managers who are wise enough to value intelligent criticism above monotonous encomiums dealt out in return for their advertising.

We will proceed to pass briefly in re-