

STAGE TRICKS.

Notwithstanding the reformation that has taken place in all that concerns stage matters, there is a good deal left to comfort even the most unyielding Tory. Floods of lime-light have been turned on; the air has been filled with "suspended women," as the French programmers style it; streets have been built upon the stage, primeval forests planted, theatrical drawing-rooms equipped, ("the furniture by Messrs. —," "the carpets by Messrs. —," to say nothing of other information)—in short, a new world has been created behind the curtain which would make Garrick's bright eyes stare, and George Frederick Cooke express his astonishment. But with this headlong march of improvement there is one trifling matter that has not kept pace. The upholstery, colouring, and light may have developed; but there are certain old traditions of "business" which are as unchanged as the yellow waistcoat, high collar, and the "flap" pockets of an old country squire. These time-honoured traditions handed down from (theatrical) father to son are as tenderly cherished as though they were heirlooms, and every night at the Royal Thaumatrope or some other well-known "Temple of Theopis" we are certain to see some of these stale and ancient histrionic peculiarities in the fullest vigour.

First as to servants. Now, who, though a martyr to his menials—suffering daily biliousness by his cook, and plundered weekly by his valet—would consent to accept the services of the gentry who are "in place" on the stage? The classes of these beings are innumerable, but all alike are unnatural and disagreeable. In the "comedy drama" we are often introduced to an attendant in a white livery coat and plush breeches, with long weeping whiskers down to his armpits, who closes his eyes as he speaks, puts his arm into the shape of a teapot handle, and struts about as though his legs were made of china. A roar attends him as he comes on and goes, with grotesque antics worthy of a pantomime. This outrageous caricature is meant to be a portrait of the London "flunkey." Not less odious is the red-faced, drunken butler in some "Sir George's" family, who, when the drawing-room is full of company, walks about addressing various persons in a thick utterance, and helps on the plot in some way. Every one knows the dapper valet of the farce, who serves a rollicking young master, and is employed to carry letters to some young lady in a boarding-house. He is always making puns, laughing privately in his hat, or flying to avoid the kick his master makes at him. Sometimes he is personated by a young lady who wears top boots and a kind of dress livery, and the combination is singularly disagreeable. Another peculiarity of stage menials is their gait. Whatever they do, be it a message, or answering the bell, or announcing visitors, it is done at a sort of headlong pace. It is curious, too, that no sooner does Mrs. Chesterfield, after writing and sealing the letter which is to announce to her husband that she quits him for ever, "strike upon the bell," or press the little spring of the little gong, than the servant appears at the door with the abruptness of a Jack-in-the-box. Needless to say that this prompt attention to our wants is not known off the stage. It may be said, too, that in most drawing-rooms people go over to the fire-place and ring the bell, otherwise we might go on chiming the little instrument for hours, and be told, in remonstrance, that "it was not 'eard in the servants' hall." Again, when a menial delivers a letter on the stage, he comes rushing in as though he were a postman, with a salver extended, halts like a soldier, answers the question in a loud, off-hand fashion, and gets off, right about face, at the same speed. The way in which announcements of visitors, carriages, &c., are made on the stage, is simply detestable. At some houses there is a walnut-faced, Digby-looking person who seems to be always selected for livery—a preference he no doubt owes to this brisk style of doing his work, which has secured the stage manager's approbation. How curious, too, the hash of French names. "Mussier le Shevaller de, &c.!" "A letter for Mardarm!"

The pert valet is associated with some extraordinary traditions. "Did you give my letter?" asks his master on many occasions. "Yes, sir, I did." "Well, what did he say, sir?" "He told me to go to the Devil!" "And what did you do?" "Well, sir, I came to you!" It would be impossible to say in how many pieces this time-honoured jest turns up. It may be suspected that it is often introduced as a valuable piece of repartee. But, after all, what would his part be, shorn of one important piece of business? or, indeed, what would the drama itself be without it? Repeated again and again without variation; renewed two or three times during the course of a performance, the exercise in question always rouses the flagging attention of an audience into delighted sympathy. Need it be said that the allusion is to the practice of stage-kissing? Kissing at the close of a scene has obtained, and will always obtain, so long as the British drama shall flourish. The servant—notably the pert valet aforesaid—always enjoys the chief share of this pastime. He has brought his master's letter for delivery to Susan's "young lady." "It's very nice, ain't it, Susan, for people to be in love with each other?" "I'm sure I can't say, Mr. Smart." "I wish somebody was in love with me, Susan." Susan tosses her head, and wonders why on earth he should wish that. "Because"—drawing nearer—"I say, Susan, you're uncommon pretty; you are, indeed." "For shame, Mr. Smart. Let me go, or I'll scream out." Then, of course, follows a kiss-kiss, with an agitated "There's missus's bell!" and both run out at opposite sides. If the valet be a man of infinite humour he will call out, "I say, Susan, I forgot to tell you something," and by this ingenious ruse secures another salute. Who has not seen this all again and again? Among the higher classes it is not nearly so effective, nor does it evoke much sympathy. The proceedings of the valet and Susan are, no doubt, reproduced at a hundred suburban villas and Blue Lions, and touch the true chord. In genteel comedies there is a small amount tolerated between two lovers, and with certain actresses of a highly correct turn of mind the proceeding is carried out in a mimetic way, the kiss being about as genuine as the slap the clown gives the pantaloon in the pantomime.

The conventional mode on a stage of opening and reading a letter must almost jar on a spectator of nice sensibilities. Dramatic instinct, or even a little reflection, would show players how effective this simple proceeding could be made. But no. It must be carried out in a highly forced and unnatural style. "A letter!" says Henry Mordaunt, who opens it by tearing off the envelope in strips—a fashion peculiar to the stage. A very mean solution may be offered for this—viz., that stage letters are written on a cheap, thin material, which will not open in the simple style that a substantial envelope

of ordinary life does, but from its flimsy materials has to be destroyed in this mince-meat fashion. When Mordaunt has got his letter open he gives it a tap with the back of his fingers to smooth it out, and reads it invariably at arm's length, holding it with both hands. He reads it also aloud, with extraordinary emphasis (often to slow music). All this is absurd and unnatural, but our actors would sooner go to the stake than resign this "business."

Connected with the letter reading is the important interview—when one of the characters brings down two chairs, and sets them in the middle of the stage, a proceeding that is really unknown in polite life. The chair may be drawn forward for the lady, whilst the host drops carelessly on a sofa close by, but this formal "setting of chairs," which must date back to the days of Garrick, has a depressing effect on the spectator, who knows that he is "in" for a long and serious conversation. Could not also the absurd arrangement of furnishing a front scene, with the necessary two chairs and a little table, brought in specially by a stage servant, be got rid of? No amount of habit or tradition can get rid of a disagreeable jar attendant on it. So with the two menials who came to unfurnish the room, one carrying out the table and two chairs linked together in an ingenious combination.

There are certain primitive arrangements as to scenery which still obtain, notwithstanding the march of colour and canvas. There is an air of incongruity, to say the least of it, in seeing the opened archway of the castle soaring aloft, swinging and fluttering like a sail, only to disclose a banquet hall within. More disagreeable is it to see a whole cathedral, as in "Faust," in Covent Garden, hoisted aloft into the clouds. At some houses the two halves of a "flat" scene still come merrily together with a loud and startling clap; and in the same opening again we see the legs of the scene-shifter, whose shoulders are applied to the framework, cantering alone briskly. Sometimes we see a loose canvas scene drawn upwards in sudden twitches, clearly revealing the fact that the hands of men are busily engaged in the task. On the same principle great folding doors often flap to as the lover bursts indignantly from the apartment, with a rickety airiness but too significant of their canvas material; and a drawing-room with real gilt cornices, on which hang real curtains, does not at all harmonize with the sham and painted windows.

Another direction, too, in which there is room for improvement, is the fashion of eating and drinking on the stage. In operas we all know there is nothing in the pasteboard jug; but the singer, when he fills his goblet, does it in really too careless a manner, and does not care to conceal that he is filling out air and drinking nothing. The generous rebel, who is called on to drink to a usurping sovereign, will fling his goblet on the floor, quite reckless as to whether the peculiar "cardboard" sound may not be inconsistent with the metallic appearance—for it affects to be silver. It must be conceded, however, that eating is carried on in a thoroughly realistic manner. Actors must look back to that unique night of the production of a comedy written by a certain noble lord, and produced at the noble lord's theatre; when the realization of eating could not be further carried. There were breakfasts in a crowded country house, a picnic in the woods attached to the house; and on every occasion rich and genuine banquets were set forth—meat-pies, hams, and tongues from Messrs. Fortnum and Mason, real champagnes, and other wines. This was what might be called putting the piece "on" in a satisfactory and generous spirit. Only it was too appetizing for the audience.

It must be owned that the question of money payment in specie is rather an embarrassing one. When it is spurned, as it often is, the intended recipient of course flings "yer gold" on the ground, where, being made of tin, it makes a peculiarly light and unsatisfactory sound. On the other hand, if it were made of heavier stuff, say of iron, the rattle on the boards, the rolling about in circles, would be equally undramatic. Some *juste milieus* should surely be thought of. Objections might be also taken to the fashion in which the soldiers in helmets come in to execute their arrests, filing off three to this, three to that side, and keeping close to the wall of the chamber. A body of privates, or of police detailed for such a function would enter in more disorderly and business-like fashion. All these things are inconsistent with the great advance of scenic art in other directions, and indicates an undue adherence to tradition.—Graphic.

Music and the Drama.

Appleton's Journal calls a prima donna a compound of vulture and nightingale.

M. Alexandre Dumas is going to Italy to work on a five-act comedy for the Odéon.

Mile. Di Murska has returned to New York to enter into an engagement for an elaborate operatic tour through this country. The season, in which she will be supported by Natali-Testa, Vizzani, Mari, Rossi-Galli, and other well-known artists, will begin on the 2d of March, in Albany, whence she will go to Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia.

It is rumoured that Mr. Mapleson may probably commence his season of Her Majesty's Opera, at Drury Lane Theatre, with some performances in honour of the Royal marriage, about the middle of March. It is said that the lessee has engaged two young prima donnas who have recently achieved great success abroad—Mdlle. Lodi, from Milan and other Italian cities; and Mdlle. Singelli, from Berlin; besides a new tenor, Signor Paladini, from La Scala. Sir Michael Costa will again preside as conductor and musical director.

Lord Minto, in his recollections, describes Mrs. Siddons as being very beautiful in a room, but of the strong, powerful sort of beauty that reminds one of a handsome Jewess. "She does not speak much, and that modestly enough, but in a slow, set, and studied sort of phrase and accent, very like the most familiar passages of her acting, but still in a degree theatrical. Mr. Siddons is quite a plain, modest, well-behaved man, tall, stout, clean, and well-looking, but nothing theatrical, romantic, or witty, and his appearance not such as one would conceive the mate of the Tragic Muse ought to be."

PRACTICAL PLAYS.—Mr. Thorpe Pede has written for the Alexandria Theatre, London, a piece called "This Plot of Ground to Let," which describes his own adventures in procuring the site upon which the Theatre is built. Messrs. Baker, Montell, Chamberlain, Elton, and Hilton did their best for this title, and Mr. Pede was called before the curtain. This piece, although only interesting to those immediately concerned, is noticeable because it opens up a new and fruitful field to author managers.

"How I Opened My Box Office" would make a fine farce; "Who Painted My Act Drop," a capital comediata; "My Architect's Bill," a three-act melodrama, and "Chorister's Wanted," a lovely comic opera.

Herr Wagner's last appeal to the public for subscriptions to enable him to complete his theatre at Bayreuth seems to have produced but little effect. The total amount subscribed, including the profits of Herr Wagner's concerts in North Germany, is about 100,000 thalers, and nearly the whole of this sum has already been expended in constructing the outer shell of the building. The few workmen who still remain are employed in removing the scaffolding, but nothing more can be done for want of funds. It is estimated that a further sum of 200,000 thalers would be required for the construction of the stage, the purchase of scenery, and the engagement of painters and musicians. As there does not seem to be any prospect of obtaining this amount by public subscription, it is proposed to apply to the "crowned heads" of Germany for their combined assistance in behalf of the undertaking.

GERMAN PLAYS.—A German correspondent writes: The stage teems with new pieces. For example, the manager of one of the principal Vienna theatres received for examination over 200 original dramas last year, from various known and unknown authors, of which he found only eighteen available, and this is said to be the case at all the principal theatres. The plays that are accepted are in general excellent studies of character, and full of satire upon the foibles of the day. And yet, however cordially a new piece is received, it seldom has a "run." The craving for novelty soon pushes it aside, after three or four performances, and these do not follow each other in succession, but at intervals of two or three weeks. A "run" of a hundred nights of a piece, however magnificent it might be, would be considered by the amusement-loving public as undesirable as it would be impossible.

Oddities.

The first thing a promising youth said to a dog presenting his nose at his heels, was: "Go away! Do you think I'm a bone?"

Two hearts that beat as one are singularly oblivious to mud. We never knew a man in love to circulate a petition for a new pavement or an additional lamp-post.

A Peoria naturalist, in attempting to warm the ears of a frozen wasp over a gas jet, discovered that the tail of the insect thawed out first, and worked with a rapidity that was as astonishing as the hideous profanity of the naturalist, who held the insect by the tail while thus experimenting.

An Iowa school-teacher has been discharged for the offense of kissing a female assistant. Whereupon a local paper inquires "what inducement is there for any person to exile himself to the country districts of Iowa to direct the young idea in its musket practice if he is to be denied the ordinary luxuries of every-day life?"

In Galloway large crags are met with having ancient writings on them. One on the farm of Knockleby has cut deep on the upper side, "Lift me up and I'll tell you more." A number of people gathered to this crag and succeeded in lifting it up, in hopes of being well repaid; but instead of finding any gold, they found written on it, "Lay me down as I was before."

FIFTH AVENUE POCAHONTASES.—A correspondent writes: "A brand-new thing is the 'unbleached face powder,' a clear olive tint, considered much more stylish than the old-time pearl-white and flesh tints. On Fifth Avenue of a bright afternoon can be met any number of these brune complexions—a dash of rose upon the cheeks, and the hair parted one side and plastered in scallops across the front. This olive powder is making Pocahontases of the already beaded and feathered damsels."

Some years ago a letter was received in New Orleans, directed to "the biggest fool in New Orleans." The postmaster was absent, and on his return one of the young clerks informed him of the receipt of the letter. "And what became of it?" inquired the postmaster. "Why," replied the clerk, "I did not know who the biggest fool in New Orleans was, so I opened the letter myself." "And what did you find in it?" inquired the postmaster. "Why," replied the clerk, "nothing but the words, 'Thou art the man!'"

SAND.—At a masquerade given one evening last week at a private residence two or three miles out from Boston, fears having been expressed that others might come who were not invited, a lady prominent in getting up the occasion sent round to the invited some cards which were formerly used by her husband, said cards to be given up at the door. The novelty consists in the card, on which was printed "Good for one load of Sand." It is not known whether the order on the cards was filled, but it is safe to say that only invited guests were present.

GEORDIE'S RUSE.—Before the adoption of the Police Act in Airdrie, a worthy named Geordie G. had the surveillance of the town. A drunken, noisy Irishman was lodged in the cells, and he caused an "awful row" by kicking the cell door with his heavy boots. Geordie went to the cell, and opening the door a little, said, "Man, ye might put aff yer bults, and I'll gie them a bit rub, so that ye'll be respectable like afore the Bailie in the mornin'." The prisoner complied with the request, and saw his mistake only when the door was closed upon him, Geordie crying out, "Ye can kick as lang as ye like noo."

CALIFORNIA SCIENCE.—This, from a California paper, is characteristic of the scientific spirit in Bret Harte's State: "A miner, fond of whiskey, attempted to obtain a drink surreptitiously from a soda-water bottle which the foreman had in a box in the wagon. Watching when the overseer had turned away for a minute, he slipped up to the wagon, slyly inserted his hand, took out the soda-water bottle, and swallowed the contents—but just then the foreman discovered him, and saw that he had drunk a bottle of quicksilver instead of the coveted whiskey. All the window glass in the neighbourhood was collected, and that miner was kept busy for two days breathing on the panes to convert them into mirrors."

HINTS TO HOUSEWIVES, BY ONE WHO KNOWS.—1. The nearest way to your husband's heart—and pocket, is through his understandings. So if you desire a new frock, never forget to have his slippers well warmed on his return from the city.

2. Every body knows how heat affects the hand. So when you go to church, wear your very oldest gloves to the hot evening services, and be careful to keep the stiff new ones for your morning devotions—when the plate goes round.

3. How to get a new bonnet. Give your hubby nice little tasty dishes every day for dinner, and stick to the cold mutton yourself. When he asks the reason, shake your head, sigh, and say, "I am obliged to economize, dear." Keep on like this for a week, then, after you have given him his second edition of grog, hint that your "poor old bonnet is getting so shabby."

4. Recollect that connubial bliss is like raspberry jam, it will keep a long time if properly preserved.

5. It is the duty of wives to be submissive and obedient to their husbands in everything. When, therefore, your lord and master tells you to go and get yourself a new silk dress or two, and seal-skin coats for the winter, obey him at once. By acting thus you will do your duty, and at the same time gratify your own—conscience.