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SATURDAY, JULY 28, 1894.

ALL THE WORLD OVER.

"I must have liberty,
Withal as large a charter as the wind—
To blow on whom I please."

[I]n the absence of other interesting subjects to discuss, I will refer to a practice which was indulged in at many of the meetings during the recent political campaign. I mean hissing. Some years ago, a contributor to *Chambers' Journal* asserted that hissing was first heard in Pandemonium, and he gave Milton as his authority. Hissing, continued this writer, comes so easily to the natural man when he wants to express dissent, that it must certainly have tried to legitimize itself again and again in state assemblies; but it has been decided that groaning and coughing accord much better with such meetings.

Formal divisions were not taken in the primitive periods of deliberative assemblies: the mind of the majority was discovered by simpler and quicker processes. Our Teutonic ancestors, according to Tacitus in his *Germania*, expressed their affirmative vote by the brandishing of their spears or rattling of their weapons: this, he says, was their utmost complimentary form of assent and approbation. They voted their "Nay" by uttering a growling noise; "if sentiments displeased them, they rejected them with murmurs." The *strepitus*, whatever it be, was certainly in a lower and less insolent and irritating tone than the hiss. Strabo tells us there was an officer (a moderator?) in the old Gaulish assemblies whose business it was to put

down all interruption; at the third summons he cut off a piece of the offender's tartan with his sword.

The theatre is of course the classical and historical home of hissing. I imagine that anyone with sufficient acquaintance with the details of dramatic history and biography might compile a big book on *Hissing in the Theatre*. It has domesticated itself there; in other places it has only lodged; if it is to be finally dislodged from other places, it will still, I suppose, assert a prescriptive title to be heard there. Theatre-hissing is not only noticed by the great dramatists of all periods of our literature, but I find it brought in to point a moral by one of our great English preachers, who has most absurdly and uncritically been taken for a Puritan, Thomas Adams. In a sermon published in 1614, under the title *The Sinner's Passing Bell*, he says: "The player that misacts an inferior and unnoted part, carries it away without censure; but if he shall play some emperor or part of observation unworthily, the spectators are ready to hiss him off." Plays, however, are hissed as well as players, and the French have an untranslatable adjective which they apply to both. Hissing began in the theatres say the French Encyclopedists, as soon as there were bad poets and bad actors impudent enough and ignorant enough to expose themselves to the criticism of a great assembled world. The French call such actors and the works of such poets *sifflable* (hiss-able); they speak of a "comédie sifflable," an "acteursifflable." I have only heard of one attempt to dislodge hissing from its home in the theatre, or rather to regulate its hour; readers who are better acquainted with theatrical history may possibly know of others. In December 1819, the police of Copenhagen issued the following curious ordinance: "After this present notice, the public shall not testify their dissatisfaction at the conclusion of a piece at the theatre until ten minutes after the fall of the curtain. At the expiration of these ten minutes, a signal will be given by three beats on a great drum, and all those who after that shall hiss, or give any other mark of disapprobation, will be arrested as disturbers of the public peace."

A French newspaper of the same year (from which this ordinance is translated) says that it was infringed the very first

night it was in force, and that arrests were made accordingly. The fact that hissing is reckoned legitimate at the theatres, has led men to choose them as the place for expressing their public dislikes in times of great excitement. Shakspeare's Cardinal Wolsey was hissed at the time of the papal aggression, but the hiss was not meant for the actor, but for Cardinal Wiseman. Hisses are directed at unpopular persons who come as spectators, and not as actors. Sir William Knighton says that George IV. always entered the theatre with an excessive dread of being saluted with this mark of public disapprobation. If he heard one single hiss, although it were immediately drowned in general and tumultuous applause, he went home wretched, and would lie awake all night thinking of that one ugly note, and not of the thousand agreeable notes. Sometimes it has not been one visitor, but a whole party of visitors who have had the hisses of the spectators directed upon them.

I imagine that a chapter might be made upon the repartees of the victims of hissing. To say that the hissed have often given back as good as they got, would be to say that they merely showed fight; but the fact is that they have very frequently, like Orator Hunt, won an unmistakable victory. On one occasion there were only seven persons in the theatre at Weimar; the seven, however, considered themselves to form a sufficient court of criticism, and taking offence at the bad acting of one performer, they hissed him energetically; the manager thereupon brought his whole company upon the stage, and out-hissed the visitors. Mr. H. C. Robinson tells us that he was present at Covent Garden Theatre with Charles and Mary Lamb in December, 1806, when Lamb's *Mr. H*— was performed for the first time. The absurdity of the piece turns upon the hero being ashamed of his name, which is only revealed at the end as "Hogsflesh." "The prologue was very well received," says Mr. Robinson, "indeed, it could not fail, being one of the very best in our language. But on the disclosure of the name, the squeamishness of the vulgar taste in the pit showed itself by hisses; and I recollect that Lamb joined, and was probably the loudest hisser in the house." Rossini, at the first performance of his famous