

Modern Drama and its Patrons

THE original drama was a poem or composition representing a picture of human life, and accommodated to action. The principal species of the drama are tragedy and comedy; inferior species are tragi-comedy, opera, comic opera, farces, comedies, melodrama. These species could be divided and sub-divided. But it would not be of any assistance in this short sketch.

Let us then consider only a few of the most prominent types, and in this deliberation remark the different classes and masses that attend these dramas; the effect they have on their minds; whether they debase or uplift them; whether play-goers desire to be educated by the witnessing of these plays, or whether they simply go to the theatres to be amused and refreshed by the scenes depicted on the stage.

For examples of the various types of drama let us choose them from the hundred stages of New York City. To start with, we will take Grand Opera as given at the "Metropolitan Opera House." The audience can be divided into three general classes. These are the "swell set," the "middle class" and the "poorer people." The first set are a most necessary and vital element that goes to make for the success of the big undertaking of producing a Grand Opera. They pay enormous subscriptions for the use of boxes for the season, and go there as a rule to show their clothes and not for the love of good music. Their presence attracts a great following of "hob-nobbers" or "would-be's" or "nearly swells," who sit in the orchestra seats and ape their wealthier brethren in the boxes. This overflow of the "swell set" shows very little genuine enthusiasm for the production.

The next class, the middle or fairly well-to-do, as a rule, attend operas and plays out of sheer love of the art, and their enthusiasm is at times quite remarkable. They go away feeling that they have spent an evening most profitably.

But the acme of whole-souled ardor, unaffected, sincere pleasure and enjoyment is reached when one considers the occupants of the top galleries. There the poorer classes of people, mostly foreigners, sit night after night and drink in the sweet notes of the opera singers,—Caruso, Melba, Geraldine Farrar, Bonci, Tetradini, Calvé, Nerdica, Albani, and others. Their enthusiasm is most real and at times knows no bounds. Surely this show of feeling can have none other but a beneficial effect on their hearts and minds. It helps to cheer them up after a long day's work,