

A GREAT PATRIOTIZING PLAY

Is Sir Herbert Tree's Production of Henry VIII. Seen in Toronto All Last Week. A Spectacle to Make Any Canadian Glad That His Ancestors Came From a Land of Merry Monarchs, Elizabethan Castles and Scarlet Cardinals

DIRECT from His Majesty's Theatre, via seven or eight months in New York, Sir Herbert Tree, with the two celebrities, Edith Wynne Matthison and Lyn Harding, and a huge retinue of people of all ages and sizes, produced Henry VIII., its first time in Canada, at the old Grand Opera House, Toronto, last week.

The performance fetched back a long vista of stage memories; not only of England and the drama, but of great actors who have trod that old stage on Adelaide St. It was there that in 1893 the writer saw his first play, which was Irving and Terry in The Merchant of Venice. In that twenty-three years the art of producing Shakespeare has not diminished. Tree's Henry is a tremendous feature of the Shakespeare revival celebrated more in America than in England this year. The pageant of great plays produced in New York would have been impossible in England. War has played hob with serious drama over there. Not here. Never before has Shakespeare meant so much. Mantell gave a week of it in the Alexandra previously. It was—well not the Shakespeare of Tree nor of Irving. Mantell exhibits Shakespeare and Mantell. Irving used to put Shakespeare into his stage setting and Irving into everything else—and Irving only, except Terry. Tree sinks his own not too powerful stage personality and goes after Shakespeare de luxe. "You feel that he is revelling in the Elizabethan age; all its gorgeous colour and romance and swashbuckling adventure, its impassioned poetry, dazzling rhetoric and pompous pageantries.

And what a production! The mere enumeration of the people who co-operated to produce this one play makes quite a long paragraph. There are ten sumptuous scenes in three acts, any one of which would have beggared an ordinary company.

There was no hint of any new Shakespeare about this; no Gordon Craig, nor Reinhardt, nor Martin Harvey. The stage was cramful of the most amazing and voluptuous detail. All that Will S. failed to get in an age of passion because he had no modern stage accessories, Tree evolves in this stupendous production replete with all the up-to-date devices. It is not a stunt. It is not an overawing simplicity. It is a barbaric prodigality. It is archaeological exactitude down to the last finicky touch of Elizabethan towers and pillars, down to the music and the Morris dances and the robes and the ceremonials that packed the old stage so full that it was as crammed as a kitchen on a dining car. If you got weary of the grand sound of the lines you could feast on the gorgeous costumes. Tired of the tedious plot you dreamed over the sceneries. Impatient with the characters you listened to the music and let your mind go wanderlusting in the dim and distant ages of mighty, marvellous old mother England with her thousands of years of kings and priests and nobles, cardinals, courts and conclaves.

It was indeed England, England—ENGLAND! Anybody who remembered the U. S. of America in that play must have lost money on Hughes. There was left in the world no democracy except that which was handed down from King John. And the Pope

B y T H E M U S I C E D I T O R



TWO FAMOUS ACTORS IN CANADA



SIR HERBERT TREE as Cardinal Wolsey in Henry VIII., which got its first production in Canada last week at the Grand Opera House, Toronto. This was Tree's first visit to Canada. With him as leading lady was that well-known rhetorical actress, Edith Wynne Matthison (Mrs. C. Rann Kennedy), who has been in Canada as often as any other famous actor or actress living. The play, which ran the whole week, attracted huge audiences in spite of the fact that some of the newspapers ran no advertising or other reference to the play or the actors.

of Rome was still the power behind the throne of England.

As to the play—little need be said. It is so little of a play that it becomes much of a pageant. There are three or four interesting characters, a thread of a plot and a deal of fine poetry. What takes up the rest of three hours and more is the epic of stage business crowded into the ten scenes by the modern actor manager. But for its historic interest and the well-known characters the play is one of Shakespeare's poorest. It is nowhere in comparison with Hamlet, Macbeth or the Merchant of Venice. But it is

so confoundingly and splendidly English that it never grows dull.

Henry, Katharine, Anne Boleyn, Wolsey and Buckingham—they are all good for an evening. We revive our old history lessons. And we wonder how history ever was such a bore. Yet the best of it is all there. The producer has charmed it into a spectacle and a riot of colour.

From prologue to the last drop of the curtain there was Beerbohm Tree all over it. Tree began where Irving left off. As Wagner made modern music what it is so Irving preluded Tree. After Tree there can be nothing

of Shakespeare except to revert either to the pastoral out-of-doors presentations or the new method. Tree is the last word in the old traditional way dating from the beginning of modern times.

But Tree is a bit wiser than some other great producers. He is the only actor manager who puts on the stage a better actor than himself. Lyn Harding is such an actor. This may be credited somewhat to Tree's generosity. It is due more to his own astute knowledge that he is not a great actor. As Cardinal Wolsey he had a great chance which he nowhere cared to take. He was always the splendid, striding figure in long-trailing scarlet, the most conspicuous on the stage with some of the best lines. He was seldom or never intensely dramatic. In the time of his triumph and his intrigues he was never such a figure as Irving was in Becket. In his downfall he was never once really pathetic except in the mere fact that his day was done. Tree's own theories of drama may have been suggested here. Telling stories at a luncheon in Toronto last week he recalled that he was in the House of Commons when war was declared.

"The whole setting was intensely dramatic because of the lack of drama," he said, describing how like a common human being Sir Edward Grey rose to speak.

In Tree's Wolsey there is a good deal of the undramatic drama. Yet he knows as well as any man that ever lived the value of suggestion and of coincidence. Speaking at the same luncheon of how Grey's speech ended just ten seconds before Big Ben struck, he remembered saying to Lloyd George: "Had you been making that speech, you would have ended just as the clock began."

Irving would have made a great Wolsey. He would have overshadowed the king. In Lyn Harding the actor-manager had a wonderful Henry. This actor who, at a luncheon table sits like a big, round-faced boy looking less like an actor than any banker or politician present, has a perfect genius for self-transformation. His last season's role in this country was Svengala, who was more unlike Lyn Harding off stage than his Henry VIII. was unlike Wolsey. As the merry uxorious and always capable monarch he was immense. He made the role as popular as Wolf Hopper ever made Wang or Dick Deadeye. He swaggered about with his kingly gout like a satyr of the 16th century. He adroitly mingled his drollery with his kingship. His voice rolled like a big organ. He was bluff King Hal whom everybody liked and whom priests and prelates feared; the dancing, swaggering monarch who kissed Anne Boleyn in the Cardinal's banquet hall, came in with a sheep's head in the Morris dance and acted as much like a common clown as any man could whose prime business it was to rule England, keep the prelates in order and revise the confession of faith. For all which we must thank the genius of Lyn Harding and the excellent coaching of Sir Herbert Tree.

As Katharine of Aragon Edith Wynne Matthison rose to some fine heights of rhetorical acting. She suited the role. Her acting is always somewhat sad. She has never been

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