

## THE STAGE AND ORCHESTRA.

SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS.

WHEN the clever little lady known to the world as Rosina Vokes, in the prime of life and power, passed so suddenly away, it was said that the gaiety of two continents had been for the time eclipsed. To the public her death appeared to come with terrible abruptness ; but to those who knew, it was not so. Mrs. Price had long suffered from pronounced weakness of the heart, which the hard work of the stage, constant travelling, continued worry, and her restless energy, tended much to aggravate. The death, at the early age of 44, of Sir Augustus Harry Glossop Harris, the most successful theatrical manager of the century, is in some respects not dissimilar to that of Rosina Vokes. Augustus Harris—or 'Gus Harris, as his friends invariably called him—had been a sick man for many years, suffering from an internal complaint, which, ceasing apparently now and again in the actual suffering produced, would lull the victim into a false security of hope, only to renew its attacks with increased virulence. It has been said that he died of overwork ; but this was only partially true. Whenever a busy man dies in harness, this remark is sure to be made. In the case of Mr. Harris—while it might possibly be true that he could have lived a little longer had he gone to some quiet seaside resort and rested—the objection was, that the man was so built that he could not rest. In a railway train, he was usually seen with notebook in hand, jotting down memoranda for future reference ; on a steamer, while other people slept, he would walk the deck all night and think out a plot for a new play, or some detail of Drury Lane or Covent Garden management. Mr. Harris knew that his life would probably be a short one, and he doubtless sought relief from both mental and bodily anguish in the exciting activity of a theatrical manager's life,—a life trying enough in any circumstances, but intensely more so when we consider the large and numerous ventures of which Sir Augustus Harris was the moving spirit. In such circumstances, is it a matter for wonder that 'Gus sought still further relief, during the later years, in a constant and increasing use of stimulants ? And be it remembered, in doing this he was only doing what hundreds of thousands of busy men with brains and energy are doing all over the world to-day, let those with neither brains to use nor work to do prate never so wisely.

The last coherent words that Sir Augustus uttered were : " I want a good long sleep ; don't let me be disturbed ; " and the poor fellow has it now, in Brompton Cemetery, where lie also his intimate co-workers, Paul Merritt and Henry Pettitt, and so many more whose loved names were familiar to that merry world both before and behind the footlights. It is no part of my province here to attempt any critical analysis of the work that Harris did. Suffice it that the dramas he produced—usually in conjunction with Pettitt or Merritt—were successful, and paid. To some people, this may not seem, I know, a high test of excellence ; but remember it is the one and only test from a manager's point of view. The plays these gentlemen produced were as a rule melodramas in which sensationalism and " stage effect " counted for much, but pieces like " The World," " Youth," " A Life of Pleasure," " Human Nature," " A Million of Money," etc., which fixed the attention of countless thousands of playgoers alike in England, Canada and the United States, could not have been without considerable merit, whatever some carping critics may say. Playwrights, as a rule to-day, do not trouble to write for professional critics or a few *soi-disant* " superior people."

The most sense of failure is evident if attempted a short sharp enough to inspire " flowing tranquility certainly all. Two a salary of figure of the and in his

In the " nickname ; " he Harris was many years St. Martin's Company of in his death something has knighted that augustized as a legislation was surprising to of Sir Augustus by the public years ago, if had been but ticular comment that of an in royal house. the sad ceremony yet published keep an open of the cortege the processioning. Not many people had come stream of hurried procession entered the deceased the route were procession included with floral tributes Wales, the Du