



BY
HECTOR CHARLESWORTH.

THERE are a few actors who occasionally appear in our theatres whom aspirants for the stage should look up to as models for study. They are men who are successful in a superlative degree, and the particular favorites of that portion of the public which spends most money at the theatres and decides largely the current of public favor. They are peculiarly the players who appeal to those people making up what is known as "Society," and this is a profitable distinction for a player in itself as well as for the following it creates for him. Men who have been far more gifted with natural dramatic power than E. H. Sothern, for instance, have battled for fame unsuccessfully, gaining not a tithe of the good fortune which has been meted out to Sothern, and to that other favorite of New York audiences, John Drew. Is it not worth while for actors who are placed before audiences of the same kind that applaud Drew and Sothern to observe the methods that these men follow so successfully.

The average society play shows the effort of a presentable young man to win a woman. The winning of woman is the eternally blessed theme for a playwright. The class of actors I allude to succeed in making the plays of this type convincing because they have in their own personalities the elements that win women. "Matinee" actors are condescendingly spoken of by some of their associates, but popularity with the women in an audience ought to be considered a good argument in a man's favor. If they like him it must show that he has qualities which appeal to gentleness and refinement. He must have some distinction above his associates, and it is rare that mere good looks will make him liked.

Women are apt to look for the qualities in an orator which make him appear on the stage like their ideal of what a gentleman is whenever they meet him. Though men notice these qualities less they are as sensible of the lack of them. Sothern and Kyrle Bellew are two of the most popular actors in the United States because they have learned on the stage to comport themselves as though in the drawing-room. They strike no false note in their representations of refined and gentlemanly characters.

Yet another instance of what reserve and good taste will do for an actor is Mr. Robt. Hilliard, who wears his clothes and walks the boards in a thoroughly natural manner. Only Mr. Hilliard is rather too much the type of a certain class of good fellow of whom one expects cynicism rather than gentleness, and an appetite for reed-birds and champagne rather than a desire to cultivate the finer shadings of life. In such a piece as "Lost 24 Hours," which presents him as a New York stock broker of moderately rapid tendencies, he is an effective realization of the very kind of man the author was attempting to portray. In fact, Mr. Hilliard used to be a New York stock broker himself, and is, therefore, falling in with his old profession in the piece.

The tendency of the stage to give us only that which is of the most frothy and flippant nature is some thing that is beginning to fill theatre-goers with alarm. The end of it all is certain to be that intelligent people will lose an interest in the theatre altogether. The craze is all for vaudeville, for something which nobody needs any thinking powers to enjoy. There is nothing in the average theatrical performance of to-day, to broaden one's sympathies, to stimulate one's intelligence, or even to cheer one's distress. In fact, if you are at all depressed, the effect of the average vaudeville performance is to produce a death-like despondency.

The stage of America smells of decadence. Three or four years ago it seemed as if the stage were going to look up. A number of brilliant and intelligent works were produced, and the reviews commenced to view the stage from an intellectual standpoint once more. In England some virile works are still being brought forth, but the storm of froth and spangles has struck the theatres of the old land just as it has here. The plaint comes from London, but the state of affairs there is glorious compared to our theatrical Mecca of New York. The song and dance has come to stay for a period. We cannot get away from it. Augustin Daly introduces it into "Twelfth Night,"

and saws up Shakespeare's most beautiful lines to give it an excuse



MISS JULIA NEILSON.

A glance over the plays which have visited Toronto so far this season proves my contention. Of course it has been customary with the cheaper class of melodrama to introduce a measure of "relief" in the way of song and

dance. This is something that cannot be stopped, for the masses love a hodge podge. But we all belong to the masses nowadays, and are being treated that way.

They have been levelling down the theatres at a savage rate. First there was "The Old Homestead," with its quartette and the ditty of "The Old Oaken Bucket;" but one pardoned the management because extremes were eschewed and the charity child of the old farm did not go about with "clickers" on the heels of her shoes and did not make allusions to the "rehearsal of that little song I must sing to-night."

There was "Superba," also a nonsense show as every one knows. Then came a very charmingly acted little comedy "Thoroughbred." It was a piece marked by excellent characterizations, but the third act found the demon of vaudeville pursuing us, and sure enough the three chief comedians were brought forward to sing their little piece.

Then there followed Miss Lillian Russell, a handsome creature we must admit, and a per-

former whose voice and talents are sometimes charming, and whose popularity is unbounded. Miss Russell at one time seemed to have aspirations toward legitimate success, but this season we find her deliberately jumping from her pedestal and indulging in the bacchanalian whirl of vaudeville. She gives us a production entitled "An American Beauty," which cost thousands of dollars, which did not contain a bar of music, a dramatic situation or a sprinkling of wit which could last beyond the present season. It had no qualities of art or permanence at all.

Then there came "Excelsior Jr.," called a burlesque and yet proving to be not even that, for it appears that even intelligent burlesque is too strong a compound for the enfeebled brains to which the theatre at the present time caters. Vaudeville, of course, does not fail at times to present us with some figure of interest and significance; and "Excelsior Jr." has this virtue. There was, for instance, David Abrahams, a Jewish lad, who played a St. Bernard dog in the drollest possible fashion, and there was also Yvette Violette, a singer of such rare esprit and refinement that her talents seemed to be going to waste amid her surroundings. For she had a mobile face and a quaint, original manner, and may hope in a better day to really command public attention.

What else did the theatres give us? Why, "The Merry World," about as bald a fricassee of trivialities as the mind can well imagine, a disconnected affair that exists to intensify the gloom of gloomy men.

You would think, perhaps, that theatrical managers would endeavor to preserve some sense of congruity in attempting to satisfy the appetite for vaudeville; but the facts lamentably demonstrated that the condition of affairs is otherwise. Even when Miss Emily Bancker presented the polite farce "Our Flat," originally a product of the society theatres of England and America, it was necessary for the heroine to sing and the hero to dance.

Again, when a clever adaptation of Sardou's "Divorçons" was produced, the performance was not considered complete unless the nigger comedian was introduced to disport himself in a song and dance.

The task of enumerating the attractions which have yielded to an extraordinary craze in the theatres grows tiresome. The strange thing about it all is that there is no lack of genuine vaudeville claiming to be nothing more than it actually is, and which, therefore, cannot be objected to.

Miss Loie Fuller, a young lady of genius along certain inventive lines, has shown us how refined and charming this class of entertainment can be. But, after all, this tendency to limit the scope of the stage to the most trivial purposes of amusement, is one which should raise an earnest protest from all thoughtful playgoers.

The delusion that a performance must be wholly nonsensical to be entertaining is perhaps responsible for the degradation that the drama is undergoing. We, on this continent, are, as a whole, a tired people, and the theory is promulgated that anything requiring a mental effort to enjoy is not recreation. No notion could be more absolutely false. An intelligent, refined performance is, after all, the most restful to the tired man, and the fierce and rapid fun of vaudeville induces absolute fatigue.

One good way to "elevate the stage" in the eyes of those prejudiced people who never see the stage itself, and who get their false impressions outside the theatre, would be to abolish many of the pictures from the billboards. A move in that direction should be encouraged in Toronto.