

THE STAGE AND ORCHESTRA.

It is not surprising, after such a bad theatrical season as has been experienced all over this continent, that the financial future of the stage is the subject just now of earnest discussion in the press. The *New York Herald* has recently devoted much space to interviews with managers, actors, actresses, and others prominently connected with the business, and the result has been, of course, many widely diverging opinions. Managers say that the leading artists receive an exorbitant salary; to this the artists usually make no answer, but continue to exact the highest amounts for their services which the competition of entertainers and the caprice of the public enable them to obtain. The grievance is an old one—about as old as the grievance between authors and publishers—and about as impossible of satisfactory solution. We are also told that the public taste is changing, that more elaborate and brighter—or, perhaps, it would be better to say more expensive—entertainments are necessary to fill a house; again it is declared that the extraordinary popularity of “the wheel” has heavily handicapped the stage and concert business; that the star system is held accountable for much of the mischief; next it is declared that there are too many companies on the road each year, that long journeys and short “stands” make work wearying, receipts small, and travelling and hotels expensive; it is said we shall have to return to the old plan of stock companies if the stage is to prosper; and a few of those who have spoken have had the courage to say that bad acting is the cause of much of the trouble.

Now, I take it that there is reason in all the causes enumerated above, but the most forcible contention is the last one: that bad acting is largely responsible for bad business. The stage everywhere—and especially the American stage—is weighted down with a plethora of ambitious mediocrity. Now-a-days, every errand boy who can make grimaces and any scullery maid who can squall (never so inharmoniously) aspire to the stage, and often get there; and if by luck or impudence they can run through a season we see next year that they are on tour with a company of their own as stars. The result is usually disastrous enough to all concerned, but the effect on the public who patronize theatres is also bad. We have been bored with so much bad acting for the past few years that people have become sceptical as to any unknown company being worth seeing, and so have gradually ceased to patronize a show that has not either in itself or its leading members an established reputation. This is, in my opinion, the first cause of the apparent lessened interest taken by the public in the theatres. The abuse of the star system has also much to answer for; when we see a man of such marked ability as Mr. Felix Morris fail, and fail badly, what can we expect from the crowds of lesser lights which attempt to twinkle in the histrionic firmament?

In reference to the often exorbitant salaries paid to prominent professionals, *The New York Musical Age*, in a recent issue, writes thus: “Close upon the news of the proposed re-organization of the firm of Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau, one of the critics hinted that next year might not be characterized by the enormous expenditure in artists’ honoraria that marked the season of 1895-1896. The money so expended by the various managers in this city is something appalling when one comes to compute it. The De Reszkes, securely intrenched behind a contract calling for fifty performances at the rate of \$1,800 apiece, and percentage on receipts, must have earned all of \$100,000 each. Calve and