



THE re-opening of the theatrical season always brings renewed hopes of better attractions than we have seen before, better acting and brighter plays. Year by year, however, the average remains about the same. There is a boom at the start which dwindles into mediocrity as midwinter comes on, and a revival in the spring. So it has always been, and so most likely it will continue to be. Still we lovers of the theatre are content with very little.

To a good many of us there is an attraction in the theatre wholly extraneous to the effect created by the play itself. To set among a throng of excited and interested people; to listen to the scraping of the orchestra; to see the footlights glaring; to catch the peculiar, restless spirit of Bohemia that clings to the theatre at all times, is joy enough.

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For my own part, I do not think the outlook for the coming season, so far as plays are concerned, is very alluring, although a great many will probably differ from me. The reaction toward romance maintains a firm hold on the theatres and star actors of the day. Romance, in the general understanding of the term, means unreality.

As a matter of fact, after some tentative advances in the direction of humanity and naturalism, the theatre has suffered a serious relapse into unreality. The star actors of the day still continue to play pieces dealing with exaggerated incident and false sentiment dressed up in satins and velvets. When critics write about such pieces they invariably praise the scenery and costumes, and a manager thinks you are a dolt if you ignore his properties. It should not matter, he considers, if the drama is sickly, so long as large sums are spent in embellishing it; the man who likes the naked truth is foolish; the way that a play is dressed, not how it is acted, counts.

The outlook is not altogether gloomy, however. There are some bright comedies and some good nonsense shows yet to be seen, and since these are unpretentious and just what they claim to be, one cannot find objection to them.

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Lillian Russell is our earliest important visitor, and though at the date of writing one cannot speak of her new piece, "An American Beauty," she is always a source of interest. The comic opera she is playing is apparently an American production, and, for that reason, not an encouraging thing to think of. Last season Lillian played the most inchoate and nonsensical bit of musical trash ever conceived, that De Koven opera "The Tzigane," but she also conferred infinite delight on every one by producing Offenbach's "La Perichole."

I do not think a more exquisite evening's entertainment than this production of a comic French classic could well be provided. It was delicious and charming throughout.

There is a great deal of talk about the dearth of good comic operas just at a time when there is most demand for them. Why, then, are stars not ambitious enough to try and revive some of the glorious little works of the French composers, like Offenbach and Lecocq? There are countless pieces absolutely unknown to the present generation of theatre-goers which, in brightness and originality, put the more recent efforts to shame. The experiment with "La Perichole" proved so delightful that one is sorry to hear that Lillian Russell is again coming forward with a trumpery American piece.

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The jolly little mummer, Francis Wilson, who always supplements his own drollery with a beautiful stage setting, seems to have scored a hit with his new comic opera "Half a King," a piece of French origin, which was done into American by Harry B. Smith and Ludwig Engländer. It is said to be reminiscent of that happy and long-lived success, "Erminie." Wilson plays the rôle of a common little mount-bank of the same peculiarities as his famous *Cadeaux*, and who gets mixed up in the same way without the nobility. Its French origin is a guarantee of some fancy and brightness, but the announcement that two American hack workers have been at it is ominous. Mr. Wilson seldom produces anything really poor, however, and after his experience with Sir Arthur Sullivan's fiasco, "The Chieftain," he has probably sought something substantially amusing.

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Turning to the legitimate drama, one finds that there is not a great deal to interest one. The coming big event at the London Lyceum, Sir Henry Irving's production of "Cymbeline," is something that, even should Irving come to America again, we would not probably have the privilege of seeing. "Cymbeline" is not a play calculated to hold interest in a theatre in the sense that "Romeo and Juliet" and "Hamlet" do, and Sir Henry is probably producing it out of sheer love for Ellen Terry's acting; for the fact that it affords her an opportunity to play *Imogen*, an exquisite study in girlish purity and innocence, is the chief matter of interest in the production.

Ellen Terry's stage career must soon draw to a close, and probably Sir Henry is satisfying some long cherished ambition of hers to play a rôle which must fascinate every really poetic actress.

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Although Henry Irving is to remain in England, some of his very best contemporaries on the London stage will come to America, and as Canada always offers a lucrative field to English performers, they will undoubtedly visit us.

E. S. Willard, who has been in England for two seasons, is the most noted of the Englishmen who is coming out, and his advent is bound to be a source of interest to all who love good and sane acting. Since he went to England Mr. Willard has had bad luck in securing plays, and will bring no noted success with him, but probably he has secured something new with which to greet his admirers on this continent. There was a rumor two or three years ago that he was to act the rôle of *Mohamet*, and another rumor that he would play *Shylock*, so perhaps we may look for him in some famous rôle.

Beerbohm Tree, another famous Englishman, is also going to visit us. He is more of a stranger than Willard, and an actor of different characteristics, if one can judge by what one reads. What he will play still remains a secret, but he is in a position to command the very best, and in these days when the business of management is chiefly in the hands of gamblers, the only safeguard to the stage lies in the ambitions of star actors. Mr. Tree is a man of true ambitions, who has always tried to make honest fame as well as money.

Still another Englishman, a comedian brimming with quiet laughter and sensibility,—John Hare, whose acting in "A Pair of Spectacles" was a charming study in love and kindness,—is to come to us. And here also we may look for delight.

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It would appear that we must therefore look to England for what is really sweet and inspiring on the stage yet awhile. Americans do not achieve that mellow grace which is the chief lustre of art. It is a growth of older peoples. There is one American announcement, however, which cannot fail to fill one with pleasurable anticipations. It is that Julia Marlowe Taber is playing the rôle of *Romola* in a dramatization of George Eliot's famous novel. No actress, I think, could portray the girlish purity and poetic soul of this beloved heroine so well. Mrs. Taber, whom we knew erstwhile as Miss Marlowe, is still the gracious, beautiful creature who first thrilled Canadians as *Parthenia*, and with a matured and developed art she should win many plaudits this season.

Yet another actress of a strangely different genre, yet of exquisite, artistic methods, is Minnie Maddern Fiske, who, one is astonished to read, is to play "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" in America. Hardy's glorious and sympathetic picture of erring womanhood is not one that we associate with such a petite and nervous personality as that of Mrs. Fiske, but that little artiste has proven herself possessed of such exquisite art and intellectuality and insight that she, in my opinion, could hardly make a real failure in anything she undertook, unless perchance she tried to be a soubrette like Della Fox, or something equally commonplace.

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I have tried to mention some of the bright particular announcements of the season, and, as one sees, the programme is rather meagre. There are scores of other events of less import, all indicative of a reaction toward melodrama. The presidential campaign in the United States is keeping many managers out of the field, and it will be difficult to keep the pot boiling in our city theatres.

THE PROMPTER.

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Miss Loie Fuller is to be at the Toronto Gpera House next week with her wonderful wardrobe of drapery that makes the soft, filmy effect peculiar to her dance. Unlike other danseuses, she does not dance in rythm to any set measure. The charm of it is in the motion and manner in which she controls the coils and clouds of material which she whirls about her, displaying the grace of every supple movement through the gauzy draperies. Now they whirl like clouds, changing with the colored lights from storm to sunshine, then into still clear moonlight. Or, then again, she is an Easter lily, whirling and twisting her drapes into petals as she floats about the stage. The dance is completely an invention of her own, and its beauty is worthy of the triumph Miss Fuller has won. Miss Fuller comes in the company controlled by her sister Ida, and announces that immediately after she goes to China—whether on missionary intent, or whether under contract with Earl Li, is left to conjecture.