

OUR LONDON LETTER.

LONDON, June 20, 1891.



SCANDALS of all sorts and of all sizes have filled the air during the last year, and one ingenious writer (Justin McCarthy in *Black and White*, I think) has attempted to account for them by the fact that we are near the end of the century. He says that just as a man makes good resolutions at the beginning of the year, which he very seldom keeps, the tendency being for him to forget them more and more as the year progresses, so the world at large unconsciously begins a century with the same noble determination, but glides off in exactly the same fashion. Perhaps this is right, but I rather doubt society improving with the coming century—but this we shall see.

Of course you all know about the baccarat case? Indeed, I believe that on the Continent and in the Colonies it has been even, if possible, more warmly discussed than it is in England. To tell the truth, people are sick of the case and all that it shows and means, for the papers have shown no discretion—they have barped and harped away, some on the side of the Prince of Wales and of the defendants generally, and others, and the most violent, on the side of the plaintiff, whom they considered a much wronged man, a martyr to his loyalty to his Prince. But it was Sir William Gordon-Cumming's marriage, on the day following that on which the verdict was declared, with a chivalrous and great American lady, that staggered both newspaper writers and newspaper readers, and undoubtedly swelled the tide of sympathy which was undoubtedly running in his favour, so strong and so popular was Sir Edward Clark's outspoken speech, in which he did not scruple to ride roughshod over the feelings of all the defendants—not even excluding the Prince of Wales.

Baron Tauchnitz, if he cannot defeat his rivals can at least out-distance them by starting fresh schemes almost before they have taken the field. His latest enterprise certainly promises well, for he proposes to start a sort of continental *Review of Reviews*; but he will differ from that publication, in that he will not condense articles but will publish them verbatim, but will not, I believe, include the illustrations. Of course a wise selection will have to be exercised, but I understand he will only publish the more important articles and the more interesting stories. The English proprietors of the magazines have, so far, proved very friendly, and have given their full sanction, and Englishmen travelling on the Continent, where it is often extremely difficult to get the English magazines, should be very grateful, as they will now, for a comparatively cheap price, be able to get the cream of the English magazines and reviews.

By the death of the O'Gorman Mahon, the House of Commons has lost one of its most interesting and picturesque figures—a link which connected the Parliament of to-day with those of the past. He was member of Parliament for Carlow, and since the Parnellite split he allied himself with the Patriot party. He was born in 1803, his father having been one of the rebels in 1798, and first entered Parliament as the member for County Clare in 1830. In appearance the O'Gorman was very striking, being a good deal over six feet in height, given to unconventionality in his dress, and wearing always his hair, which was white, very long. He was a firm believer in the merits of the *duello*, having fought a large number himself, the last person whom he challenged being Mr. Parnell.

Mr. Robert Buchanan, the Ishmael of modern literature, whose play, "The Gifted Lady," produced a short time back, in which he travestied the whole of the Ibsen gospel, proved so unsuccessful that it was taken off within a week, has promised to write a weekly causerie in the *Echo*, on any subject he chooses, and in which he will have a perfectly free hand—he will say what he likes and attack whom he pleases. In the first of these articles Mr. Buchanan will write on "Myself"—a subject, he says, in which his enemies accuse him of taking far too much interest. He also promises to amuse his friends and annoy his enemies, so that we can safely look forward to lively times in the near future.

The almost Sabbath calm which Londoners have been enjoying for the last week is over, for the omnibuses again ply their noisy trade; for the strike is over, the men having secured twelve hours a day, (Let us hope they will soon reduce it to eight) a Sunday in a fortnight off, and a higher rate of pay. Popular sympathy was all on the side of the men from the first, so that the omnibus companies did wisely in caving in.

Mr. Sam Van Beers is again in London with an exhibition, but one which will attract more genuine notice, as it is altogether free from the *risqué* note which has characterized his previous shows, for Monsieur has reformed. In future he is to be taken *au sérieux*, and his friends expect great things. This English exhibition is a great success, winning golden opinions from all and sundry.

Report speaks highly of the singers in the Handel Festival which commences next week in the Crystal Palace, under the directorship of Mr. August Morris, who has been responsible for the entire musical arrangement since 1880. The festival is a triennial affair, having been first started in 1857 by Mr. R. K. Dowley, a bootmaker's son, whose musical aspirations early took him from his father's trade and placed him on the conductor's stool. In musical matters he was at all times particularly energetic, doing for music what Mr. Richard Redgrave, C. B., R. A., (whose "Memoirs" have just been published by Messrs. Cassell & Co.) did for art.

Two dramatic experiments of the greatest interest are promised us in the distant future. Mr. H. Beerholm Tree will essay Hamlet, a part in which his many admirers have long wished to see him, and Mr. E. S. Willard will attempt King Lear, a play which has not been seen in London for many years.

Mark Twain is in the South of France with his family, writing a new humorous book, which has been secured at an abnormally high rate for the American public by an American syndicate. Let us hope that it may be better than his last work.

Heredity just now is one of the most discussed of subjects, perhaps on account of the prominent place given to it in the Ibsen drama. Certainly on the stage it seems to obtain to a very large extent. Mr. Gilbert Hare is no unworthy son, in the histrionic sense, to Mr. John Hare, and now we have Mr. Henry Irving's son, Mr. H. B. Irving, with all the blushing honours, which he won at the Oxford University dramatic performances, thick upon him, appearing at the Garrick Theatre as Lord Beaufor, in Mr. John Hare's contemplated revival of "School." I have seen Mr. Irving's performance at Oxford the last two or three years myself, and I consider that he shows much promise—but we shall see.

Really Mr. John Toole's energy seems inexhaustible. He no sooner comes back from his Australasian tour, where he can hardly have kept himself properly in touch with the "proud Spirit," than he sets to work rehearsing a burlesque of Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," a play which he has never seen, which makes it all the more wonderful. And now, not satisfied with that, he needs must give us a sort of burlesque of the pantomime method, which the great success of "L'Enfant Prodigue" has popularized over here. As the ground work of the burlesque, he has chosen the well-known farce, "Ici on parle Français," which is rechristened by a happy inspiration, "Ici on (ne) parle (pas) Française," which the company acts entirely in dumb show, being largely assisted by an excellent orchestra. It is an excellent piece of fooling, and will improve as the company get used to it, but at present they find it rather hard to repress the words, which cannot but rise unbidden to their lips, considering the number of times they have played the farce.

Dr. John Todhunter, the poet of Belford Park, has produced at the Vaudeville Theatre, in a series of matinees, his exquisitely pretty poetical play, which was so great a success when acted privately, "A Sicilian Idyll," together with a new poetic drama, "The Poison Flower," which from the literary point of view, was hardly so successful. From the dramatic standpoint, both plays failed miserably, so badly were they acted by a number of incompetent amateurs, (whose performances became all the more

dreary in that they were assisted by one or two competent professionals) who mouthed their words so that but few lines of the dialogue reached the public, from over the footlights. With such surroundings any play would be a failure—Dr. Todhunter should try again. By the way, the "Sicilian Idyll" has been published in book form by Mr. Elkin Mathews and is well worth reading.

A new departure has been made at Terry's Theatre, where Mr. George Edwards is at present manager. The evening's amusement consists of three plays, or playlets, each in one act and each of an hour's duration. First comes "A Lancashire Lass," by Mr. Brandon Thomas, a pretty play on a well worn theme, which merits no special mention. Next comes a comedieta from the pen of Mr. W. Grossmith, entitled "A Commission" and a very successful little piece it is, full of quaint situations and smart dialogue, keeping the house in one broad smile. But the piece of the evening is the "Pantomime Rehearsal" of Mr. Cecil Clay, a farce which has already been played by a company identical in many respects, in America, where it was a tremendous success. It is a sort of modern rendering of Sheridan's "Critic," or of the play scene in "The Midsummer Night's Dream" for it shows a company of amateurs rehearsing for an amateur pantomime. The fooling is excellent, and the dialogue is, with the different types of character being hit off with the greatest success. Of the actors Mr. Weedon Grossmith, Mr. Brandon Thomas, Mr. Elliott and Miss Edith Chester deserve the highest praise where all were excellent.

At the Alhambra has just been produced on a scale of unparalleled magnificence, a new ballet, entitled "Oriola" by MM. Coppi and Jacobi. The heroine of the ballet is a denizen of the lower regions, who pays a flying visit to Japan, where she falls in love with a gallant youth who becomes so devoted to her that he returns with her to the abode of Lucifer. Such is the slight story, and both in the infernal regions and in Japan, delighted Londoners are given a spectacle which they have never seen equalled and which they are not likely to see excelled for some years to come.

"A Night's Frolic," an adaptation given of the United States, from the German of Von Moser, now holds the boards at the Strand Theatre, where Mr. Willie Edouin has had a run of bad luck ever since the withdrawal of "Our Flat," months ago. It is a miserable production, with a central scheme of extreme suggestiveness, neither worthy of the theatre nor of the actors and actresses, whom one regrets to see thrown away on such poor stuff.

GRANT RICHARDS.

Stray Notes.

"I attended two theatres the first night I was in London," wrote a rural buck to his fond parents, "and three balls the next. Had a glorious time the first night, and only got ten shillings on my watch the second."

The unsophisticated old people are still wondering what he meant.

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Dewson.—"Which way now, my boy?"

Blithely.—"I'm going over to Professor Memonics to take my memory lesson. Great thing, you know."

Dewson.—"I suppose so. While you are there just ask the professor to punch you up a little bit about that tenner you borrowed of me last autumn, will you?"

* * *

"I suppose to educate your daughter in music costs a great deal of money?"

"Yes, but she's made it all back for me."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I'd been trying to buy out my next neighbour at half price for years and could never bring him to terms until she came home and began playing."

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Uncle Joe Atwell was a gruff sea captain, with not much of an ear for music, and was annoyed by the vigour with which his niece pounded the piano. She had taken a notion to attend one or other of the conservatories of music, so she asked:

"Uncle Joe, where's a good place to learn the piano?"

"On a raft in mid ocean," he replied explosively.