



RUSKIN sets it down as a principle for all the arts, that only the best possible, under the circumstances, is truly excellent; and, perhaps, this is the reason why grand opera, in the smaller cities of this country, has been a thing of the past. Opera cannot stand the racket of travel and speculation, and the various vicissitudes which beset the itinerant attractions which alone visit the smaller cities. It only flourishes when domesticated in a home of its own, and with a certain amount of peace and quietness. Perhaps this is more or less true of all theatrical attractions; but it is true to such a degree of grand opera, that nowadays we seldom or never see it in our provincial cities. The reasons for this are economic. It costs so much to produce any good work in even a moderate style; the vicissitudes of the road play such havoc with the human voice; the clientele to which appeal can be made, is so limited in a new country like this, where people are not concerned with art in its integrity,—that any attempt to produce the great works with a road company must be pitiful indeed. Recently the only grand opera company on the road—the Marie Tavyary organisation—visited us, and afforded ample proof of all that I have set down here.

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People cannot enjoy what is good in any art without certain sacrifices in the cause thereof. They cannot expect that benevolent managers will come along with the best that the land affords, in the way of musical talent, and ask them to come and see it for the payment of a small sum which will go toward recompensing the philanthropist. We can never have good opera until we are sufficiently ambitious to wish to own a share in it ourselves. It is not necessary for us to spend millions, as they have done in New York on the Metropolitan Opera House productions. It is possible to achieve excellence in a much less ambitious way. Every little city in Germany and in Italy has its opera, where the national works are sung with an enthusiasm which makes up in a great measure for the lack of world-famous talent in the productions. These permanent opera houses exist because the people of these cities have enough love for what is beautiful in music to make sacrifices, and keep it always with them.

It is one of the hopes cherished by great socialists like Sir Henry Irving, and humble socialists like myself, that the stream of tendency—which has already given us such notable socialistic blessings as a common school system, a common postal service, and a common water supply,—will some day bring us to a stage where we shall have municipal theatres and municipal opera houses, and municipal bands of players and singers; instead of the pitiful enterprises we now enjoy, which live from hand to mouth on the

caprices of the public, and the gambling instincts of managers. Until then, we might as well give up all hope of decent and artistic grand opera in provincial cities of Ontario.

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I suppose we are, in a way, a music-loving community here in Toronto. People are constantly telling me so, and we do manage to support a number of excellent artists, as well as a changing band of musical mountebanks, from year to year. When e'er I take my walks abroad, I hear a piano in nearly every house, giving forth a Sousa march from the depths of its agonised soul; and I am sure if everyone who loves the melodies of "Faust," for instance, could be persuaded to pay, say half-a-dollar, for the privilege of hearing the great work, we could afford the grandest production of Gounod's masterpiece ever heard,—provided we had a hall big enough to hold the audience. Even under ordinary circumstances, at ordinary theatrical rates, something rather excellent, if not very magnificent, could be heard quite frequently in Toronto, if people would consent to fill the theatre at every performance. The difficulty is, that people here are not enthusiastic about music because it is beautiful, but rather as an advertisement for themselves.

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It is quite possible that the desire to see something artistic, may be one of the reasons why Torontonians turn out in large numbers to see a famous artist occasionally; but, on the whole, they go to the theatre just as they go to the horse show, to advertise themselves. It is only when a singer, or an actor, has acquired a notoriety greater than his art, that they consider the chances of self-advertisement sufficient to warrant attendance. Another consideration—and a weighty one—in this community, is the fact that more than half the lovers of music disapprove of the vehicle for which most of the grandest music in the world was written. Opposition to the theatre is not yet dead, even though it be illogical. A vast number of people can quite reconcile their consciences to hearing a lady and gentleman, in evening dress, sing the "Du Miserere" number from "Il Trovatore," on a concert platform; or are even delighted when, at a band concert, the trombonist goes up to the gallery and impersonates the troubadour in his lower warbling to the cornetist, who imitates *Leonora*, on the stage below. But they would be horrified if the troubadour were singing from a handsome stage tower, in the doublet and hose of grand opera; and if *Leonora* endeavoured to really present the emotions of the distraught girl. Such is the inconsistency of human kind. All is vanity, indeed!—just as the good people I am writing of, believe.

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Goodness knows, the old-fashioned is ridiculous enough, and suffers grotesquely if the presentation is poor. The romantic movement seems very tawdry nowadays, and though the old melodies of "Lucia," "Il Trovatore," or "Der Freischütz," are sweet enough to the ear, they are harmonies out of a chaos of incongruities. High-falutin' sen-

timents and mad idealism are good enough to inspire children with; but the inspiration of realism has played havoc with the old school, and what once seemed sublime, now has tottered into the realm of the ridiculous. The modern opera, like "Carmen," or "Cavalleria Rusticana," seems so clear and lucid, and logical, compared to the old operas, whose sentiments are so high that you can never hope to find out what they mean. Music is the art of suggestion, no doubt; it becomes mere trickery when it attempts to become the art of painting, however; and what we ask of the composer nowadays is, that he be realistic, at I suggest something that is tangible and true. One is sorry to see the old operas on the wane, nevertheless, and feels keenly the depletion of music in the theatre, which strikes us from all sides. But it is a matter you can only sigh over, and do nothing else to remedy. THE PROMPTER.

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In "The Henrietta" which was presented at the Grand in mid-May, we have another of those wholesome plays of the class of "Shore Acres" and "A Pair of Spectacles," in the matter not only of excellent presentation, but of elevating influence.

Perhaps it is hardly fair to compare "The Henrietta" with either of these, since the plot and *motif* were in each instance entirely unlike,—yet, we are referring rather to effects, and certainly the lesson pressed home in "The Henrietta" is as necessary to the business world of to-day, as that taught by the genial old optimist which the comedian Hare so finely personates.

To those who know Wall Street, even only as spectators; who have looked down from the gallery into the arena where tumult reigns, and watched the white, strained faces of the men as they rush from one stock indicator to another,—this stage story of Wall Street, this glimpse behind other scenes than those of painted canvas, comes with a special impressment. Not that the drama is all tragedy; so much is it lightened by the woven thread of comedy that we turn away from the dropped curtain with the all's-well-that-ends-well smile upon our faces;—and only when we are out under the stars does the terror and truth of that realistic death scene, in the third act, come upon us.

The cast was exceptionally good. Stuart Robson, as *Bertie Vanalstyne*, a New York Anglo-maniac, yet, with the inherited paternal vein of Wall Street shrewdness, creates a most successful rôle of the Dundreary type. The old Wall Street speculator and the opulent widow were equally clever impersonations.

Yet, I think, that perhaps the vision that will remain longest in the memory of all who witnessed the play, is that of the dead face of the young speculator, when, with the passing of his last breath, he sat facing the audience for full thirty seconds before the falling of the curtain.

Those staring, fixed eyes, the pinched nostrils,—the drawn, pallid face, the hands thrown out with rigid fingers outstretched;—it was awful.

And yet, from a dramatic standpoint, it was magnificent acting. AUDREY.



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