

MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

THE dramatic season in Toronto was brought to a brilliant close by the appearance of the finest actor of America. The name of Edwin Booth is a household word among all lovers of the drama on this continent, and his first visit to Toronto and Canada was an event of more than common artistic significance. Mr. Booth is something more than the mere actor; in him have been combined also the enterprise of the theatrical manager, and the enthusiasm of the educator in dramatic taste. He has laboured more assiduously, and with greater singleness of purpose, to foster a love for the healthy and legitimate drama, than any other man in America; and to him principally is due the high place which that branch of his art now holds on this continent. In a generation given over, in its theatrical amusements, to tawdry sensationalism, burlesque, opera-bouffe, negro minstrels, variety performances, female gymnasts, Black-Crook business, lime light, and legs, he kept alive some sparks of love for the highest department of the dramatic art. But he fell upon evil days; his efforts were vain, and he paid the inevitable penalty in financial ruin. Still, "the whirligig of time brings about its revenges." The day comes when even the display of the female form palls upon the jaded appetite, and a public satiated with novelties turns, clothed and in its right mind, to the pure and wholesome food which affords the only true sustenance to a healthy intellectual and moral life. Within the last three or four years a re-awakening of this kind has taken place in the dramatic world, and Shakespeare and the legitimate drama are again in the ascendant.

Bearing in mind, then, the part taken by Mr. Booth in bringing about this result, it must have been with great satisfaction that all true lovers of the drama witnessed the right royal welcome accorded to him in Toronto—a testimony due as much to the worth of the man and the conscientious labours of the manager, as to the celebrity of the artist. Great, however, as Mr. Booth's services have been in the cause of the higher drama, and deserving as they are of the amplest recognition, they must not be allowed to blind us to the faults of the actor. Mr. Booth appeared in seven characters: *Hamlet*, *Claude Melnotte*, *Richelieu*, *Richard II.*, *Shylock*, *Benedick*, and *Iago*; and though but one representation of each was given, yet, the range being an extensive one, a tolerably accurate judgment can be formed of his general powers. We shall express our own opinion most comprehensively by saying that Mr. Booth, though undoubtedly a very fine actor, is not a great one. The true

fire is wanting. He never fully possesses himself of the character he is representing, is unmistakably artificial, and, by consequence, the spectator can seldom or never divest himself of the impression that he is witnessing *acting*. His physical gifts are not of the highest: his figure, though graceful, is short, and consequently almost incapable of embodying the majestic repose so essential at times to the tragic actor; his face is limited in its range of expression; and his voice (which frequently recalls that of his brother Junius) is poor in quality, and deficient in power and in variety of intonation. His elocutionary method—at least in tragic passages, where he has to speak *ore rotundo*—is vicious, his utterance, though remarkably distinct, being painfully slow and laboured. His walk is stagey, except, of course, in characters such as Richelieu and Shylock, where he assumes the gait of an old man; and he uses far too much gesture, especially with his arms, hands, and fingers. Besides these mannerisms, he has an unpleasant and frequent trick of turning up his eyes, so as to show the white underneath the iris. It is strange indeed to see the pains which some actors take to be unnatural. Mr. Booth's method of dealing with his "points" is also objectionable, the intention to make them very obvious. A really great actor never *makes* points; he simply acts right on, up to the level of the various situations, and lets the points make themselves. Another complaint we have to urge against Mr. Booth is that he makes frequent slips in the author's language, and occasionally takes unwarrantable liberties with his text; thus, in "Hamlet" he omitted the greater portion of the most telling soliloquy in the play—"Oh! what a rogue and peasant slave am I;" and in "Richelieu," for the purpose, apparently, of making a sensational ending to the fourth act, he placed the threatened "curse of Rome" after the defiance of Baradas, instead of before it, as Bulwer wrote it.

It is obvious that an actor in whom are combined so many and such glaring defects cannot claim to belong to the first rank. In fact, Mr. Booth is not to be compared, in general power, with Mr. T. C. King, who, whatever may be his faults, is emphatically a great actor—in our opinion the greatest that has ever visited Toronto; nor in any one of his performances here did he rise to the level attained by Mr. Barry Sullivan in his matchless delineation of *Richard III.*

Of the various characters assumed by Mr. Booth, his *Iago* was the most satisfactory. His conception was natural and good, and his elocution, except in a very few passages,