

East and the voices in the West crying aloud in the hearing of ever-increasing multitudes that a change must come. And when it does come we know that a good deal must go, amongst it certain quaint old forms that have grown dear to us perhaps. And so, in the reflected light of nineteenth century legislative procedure, as it is in our neighbours' capital for instance, where the legislators come to order, like so many school-boys, at the tap of the Speaker's ferule and the calling of the roll, and where the cuspadore testifies all day long to at least one blessing put within general reach by a democratic form of government, every act of stately deference acquires a new importance and every knee-buckle shines with an individually valuable lustre.

It is a scene well worth a journey to witness, not only for its dignity and importance in itself as illustrating Canadian comprehension of the fitness of things, and as symbolic of our relation to the greatest of earthly Powers, but for the lesser reasons of its brilliancy as a picture, its delightful *rococo* suggestion in the matter of costumes, its materialization, for a fleeting moment, of the impressions that are fading, for most of us, between the pages of the school histories. It is something to see that unwieldy brass "bauble," the mace, borne in by the sergeant-at-arms' deputy and laid upon its cushions on the table in the midst of the gowned clerks, and to reflect upon all that has been done and undone by its authority in debates which still echo round the world. This mace of ours, by the way, is said upon Mr. Bourinot's authority to be the same used in the old Legislative Council of Canada, it having been saved from the general destruction of 1849 by one Botterel; so it is worthy our most respectful consideration on its own account as well as on its antecedents'. Nor is it wholly unprofitable to gaze upon that solemn functionary, the Black Rod, in the exercise of his voluntary vertebral humiliation, remembering the portentousness of his office in other days, and the long historical succession of his bows.

Before the Governor-General, as he takes the Speech from the hand of his *aide-de-camp*, and lifts his plumed hat in acknowledgment of the dignity of the "Honourable Gentlemen of the Senate," lies a very creditable representation of the Canadian social structure. The Premier and his Ministers, the Major-General of Militia, and a few distinguished visitors representing official eminence from one or more of the Provinces, are grouped about him. At the foot of the throne-chair sit the judges of the Supreme Court on our modern adaptation of the woollack, in their scarlet robes and capes and ermine hoods. The Senators occupy the inside row of seats, behind them their wives, daughters or lady friends in all their bravest apparel. Coming as they do from all parts of the Dominion these ladies, among whom are included the members' wives, make an interestingly typical assemblage, and one which few Canadians would fail to point to with pride and satisfaction. The seats at the lower end of the Senate Chamber are filled with the clergy and notable visitors, where the tightly-buttoned frockcoat of the western evangelist brushes the rich purple vestments of Monseigneur. Behind the bar through the Commons, and through the crowd may be seen the acutely intelligent faces of many of the cleverest men on the Canadian press. Over it all there is a superb surface play of colour and glitter; but the most casual observer detects under this the principal elements of a social composite which is as reasonable in theory, as abounding in opportunity, and as honourably put together as any in the world. His Excellency, in contemplating the assemblage called forth by the "opening of the House," finds in the answering regard a strong expression of national individuality.

The only other public event of social importance last week was Saturday evening's "Drawing-room," where Their Excellencies received the respects of a procession of people who were exactly one hour in passing a given point of the gubernatorial presence. It was an exceptionally brilliant affair, although to the individual it consisted of but two brief courtesies, a bow in return, and a smile perhaps, if he were favoured with Viceregal recognition. The chief satisfaction derivable was to be had in the galleries, where the onlookers who had done their duty discovered what a large chapter in the book of human nature might be read in a gesture of deference. It reminded one a little of the astonishing table of contents George Meredith put into the mouth of that clever woman of his who says of "the Egoist," "You see he has a leg."

Nothing important is expected at "the Buildings" for several days, the House having adjourned to-day after a sitting of fifty minutes. The Fisheries Debate, upon which so much more interest and energy will be concentrated than upon any other during the Session, will come on soon, but not immediately, the announcement having been made to-day that sundry important papers had not yet been received.

Ottawa, Feb. 27th.

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### LONDON LETTER.

THE Haymarket Theatre, crammed with all sorts of interesting people, was a curious sight the opening night of *Partners*, and presented as gay and pleasant a picture of the present-day playhouse as any one could wish to see. The popular manager's friends overflowed both stalls and boxes, and even condescended to occupy the plebeian dress circle—a spot solely tenanted as a rule by Clapham in red opera cloaks, or Belsize Park in square black gowns,—and the energy with which the actors and actresses were cheered by vociferous clapping in and out of season was something delightful to hear. But how little this portion of a first night's audience are to be trusted. Are they blinded by affection, these kind hearted stalls and boxes, this blandly-smiling gallant dress-circle? In the pit, or in the great hot galleries close to the chandelier in the roof, the verdict of the

crowd—a verdict which it is grimly said is always wrong as regards art—was curiously different to that expressed by the "gigmanity" who applauded all through the tedious five acts, through the long-drawn dull unfolding of the plot. There the young clerks and old clerks, shopmen from Whitely's, caretakers from City offices, girls serving in Marshall's, girls on whom Howell and James depend, could hardly conceal their yawns, and compared notes with each other as to the merits of *The Golden Ladder*, or *The Bells of Haslemere* as opposed to the play they were witnessing. They were neither impatient nor rude, considering their provocation. Once at the beginning the immense applause when Miss Marion Terry appeared was cut short by a voice from the Upper Circles remarking "That's enough for her," and at the end, when the stalls demanded the author, then the galleries cried out that he was not wanted: and a few words, the reverse of complimentary, were addressed to the lagging musicians: but beyond this nothing could be said against the behaviour of those whom the Reverend Alexander Carlyle (one of the best of the last century chroniclers) was wont to call "the commons." They were as attentive as, if rather wiser than, we were: has nature made them as good critics? Mr. Anstey's "Voces Populi" in *Punch* are echoes, as genuine as the voices we listen to through the telephone. That one can swear: but in the boxes as well as in the pit foolish remarks on the performance are the rule, not the exception. The little knowledge—that dangerous gift—which educated classes possess enables them to express better what they mean, but I think the *canaille* (do you like that uncivil old word?) are as quick as we are at feeling what they know to be true. One person in twenty is more sensible than his neighbours: take that twentieth man in stall and gallery, and their verdict will coincide in spite of the difference in their grammar. At *Partners* Mr. Tree's estimable, if thoughtless friends, succeeded in expressing their goodwill towards him and his piece: but when they are no longer there *en masse* the real opinion of the theatre-goer will not fail to make itself heard. I saw Buchanan walking restlessly up and down, up and down, the corridor between the acts: and Irving's second boy, a handsome lad of sixteen, with a cream-coloured complexion and jet black hair, lounged in a box with the Bancrofts and Mrs. Tree; and Alma Tadema was not far from me, as was Hamilton Aide; and you may be sure Sir Gorgius Midas and Mrs. Ponsonby de Tompkins, Sir Pompey Bedell, Grigsby, Sir Peter, —all the familiar *Punch* types—occupied prominent positions. These, and many more, were agreed in saying that the play was excellent, and the acting all it should be, and this opinion was repeated next day in most of the papers: but in spite of that I doubt if this tedious, lumbering, five-act drama can succeed. Beerbohm-Tree is an admirable actor, and does what he can: still Borgfeldt would be an intolerable bore off the stage, and is decidedly an intolerable bore on it: and Miss Terry has not strength of character enough to make one feel interested in foolish Claire and her aimless flirtation; while the rest of the company, having stupid or unnatural things to say, repeat them stupidly and unnaturally. So it came to pass that when I left the theatre I felt as if I had spent a fortnight there at least, and spent it unprofitably too: and the galleries said as much to each other as they clattered down the stone stairs, or stood in groups about the muddy pavements.

It was in '58 that Dickens, in a letter to Forster, spoke of the pleasure Marie Milton—now Mrs. Bancroft—had given him as the boy Pippo, in *The Maid and the Magpie*. "I call her the cleverest girl I have ever seen on the stage in my time," he says, "and the most singularly original." We have all endorsed this opinion since then. I remember her at the "Prince of Wales," and feel satisfied that the spirit of some one of the actresses of Garrick's time has revisited the earth in her guise. Who will ever come near her in *Caste*, *School*, *Ours*—those ideal comedies which are to the ordinary play what Mr. Du Maurier's drawings are to those of the draughtsmen of the *Penny Illustrated* or *Family Herald*? Who will ever touch her performance of Nan in *The Good for Nothing*, of the girl in Gilbert's *Sweethearts*, of Peg Woffington in *Masks and Faces*? Such a woman ought never to grow old. The very tones of her voice as she passed through the Haymarket swinging doors the other night made us all turn with a pleased start, and she went to her carriage, smiled on, greeted, by those who have laughed and cried with her times out of number. What will she make of her book? Some people when they take up their pens lose their identity, and the little I have read of hers, short stories, and school-girl verse chiefly, makes me think nature left out in her that literary capacity with which the present generation is largely endowed. Still the memoirs should be interesting, and I hear *fac-similes* of some of Robertson's MS. are to be given. I remember Robertson—he was Mrs. Kendal's brother, and used to say of himself, "I come of a large and disunited family,"—a delicate, bright-eyed man, with a reddish beard, and the thinnest hands I ever felt; and I have a recollection of a Sunday afternoon spent in his little drawingroom up in St. John's Wood, when he told us of a new comedy he meant to write, the scene, Italy, in which the hero, an artist, was to be called suddenly from the studio, and then an interchange of garments was to be effected between the girl-model, and a young Duchess in love with the painter. There was to be consequent mystification, but exactly what happened I have no recollection of. Robertson died a few weeks after our visit, of rapid consumption. I wonder if he ever sketched out the plot. He it was who told us Dickens could not endure *Lord Dundreary* (what a badly-written, silly play it was!), that he saw it but once, and then only sat out two of the acts, and this at a time when the theatre was crowded week after week, and the town was ringing with Dundreary jokes. One cannot understand its success nowadays, and why Sotherton, an admirable actor in other parts, condescended to make of himself such a buffoon.

And now, inasmuch as truth is stranger than fiction, I want to tell you