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## TALES OF THE TOWN.

*"I must have liberty,  
Withal as large a charter as the wind—  
To blow on whom I please."*

LOVERS of the drama in Victoria complain bitterly of the prolonged absence of anything approaching a first-class theatrical entertainment at The Victoria. Similar murmurs of discontent are heard from other cities on the Coast. The fact is the Pacific Coast is now receiving anything but complimentary notices from the Eastern press, and theatrical people are not the least bit anxious to travel this way. It has gone on record that Lillian Russell said we could not appreciate true art, and Blanche Walsh also dropped sundry uncomplimentary remarks about us. The *Dramatic Times* has taken up the fight, because it has "watched with the closest scrutiny the business along the Pacific." This paper quite truthfully remarks that our tastes are different to those of the people in the East, and that our likes and dislikes arise more from close study than from a cosmopolitan way of taking things. The people here are like one large family; one's interest is all's interest, and in the unity there is a feeling that none but the best should be tolerated. Opinions, of course, differ as to the capability of some of the companies which have visited the coast, but it is generally admitted that good shows have made money, and the extraordinary business of Henry Irving goes to show that San Francisco is not poor, nor weak in its judgment. The people on the coast have been smarting under inferior plays and inferior actors and have resented it. They received the answer that their town was no

good. This is all wrong. Plays have been presented here which would not be endured in the East. In fact the whole case simmers down to one point. Give good plays with good actors and good business will result. Managers who have played the Coast cities have always reaped a rich harvest when their attractions deserved it.

An Eastern critic with a good deal of reason bemoans the mediocrity talent which is produced in the United States, and alludes to the tremendous financial winnings made by Irving and Terry, Coquelin and Hading. He claims that American talent is so poorly developed that the public rewards mediocrity with too lavish a hand, and that as the artists do well in a material way without careful preparation or material study, there is no incentive or spur to force them to better work. And it must be admitted that he speaks plainly and to the point. Now that Booth is no more, it is hard to single out an actor of American origin or training who even approximates greatness. There are a great many fairly good actors and actresses, and they are covered with dollars and praise as if they had reached the topmost pinnacle of perfection and pre-empted the highest footholds. But Americans are not so blinded by their modicum of talent that they consider the best imported talent as much superior to anything they have, and they throng the theatres at doubled prices to see an Irving or a Coquelin, or to listen to a Patti or a Materna. And by doing this they tacitly confess that they know they are better than the American performers. They have taste enough to appreciate fine acting and good

singing, and to discriminate between that which is really good and that which is passably good; but they have not sense enough to demand the same degree of excellence from their home artists. Even Mansfield, one of the best actors who call the United States home does not approach Willard in fine shading and expressive acting, and he is a hybrid exotic of obscure origin, who has only been adopted. It is true that there has been a marked improvement in acting in the United States in the past ten years, and that the audiences have in a way become more critical, but they can never expect to reach the highest standards until their reception of the mediocre becomes more frosty and applause is withheld from everything but the best in the legitimate lines.

"It's funny how little some people know about the food they eat and how much they misuse quantities," remarked a Fort street gentleman to his wife one morning quite recently as they were seated at the breakfast table. "Now, you know the restaurant where I eat when I'm down town. There's one fellow whom I always meet there at lunch, who doesn't know any more about the use of sugar than gun powder, and the worst of it is he won't be taught. I have known him to put thirteen big lumps into a cup of coffee, and then drink the nauseating mixture as if it were sweetened just right. I explained to him that the cup of coffee would only absorb so much sugar anyway, and that what he put in above the right amount was only wasted and would remain undissolved at the bottom of the cup, but he keeps

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