

sentation of a sanguinary railway accident will perhaps awake him into enthusiasm.

The tendency of the stage from the earliest times appears to have been to deviate from the strict paths of morality, to such an extent indeed that the force of law has been found necessary to restrain it within the bounds of common decency. We must confess likewise that it has often responded to and reflected in itself a coarse and licentious era, but we should not be too hasty on that account to condemn the whole because it has at times overstepped the bounds of propriety: it only shares this fault with other arts such as sculpture, painting, and poetry, all of which have at times fallen into objectionable extremes.

In the crusade which in the sixteenth century was waged with such vigor against all public amusements, the drama shared the common condemnation under this Puritanical movement; the body of the clergy even, who in this respect had been for some time enacting the part of a Frankenstein, held up her hands in holy horror at the unlooked for form that this creature of her own creation had assumed. To such an extent was this movement carried that in the reign of Charles I. a direct interdict was placed upon all manner of dramatic performances.

This prohibitory measure in conjunction with the corrupt state of public taste during this period probably throws light upon a notable neglect with regard to the greatest character of English Dramatic Literature, namely, Shakespeare.

It is natural to wonder why, he who has done so much to elevate his country in the standard of Literature, who has so improved the taste and promoted the happiness of his countrymen, has been allowed to sink in his personal nature into oblivion: as to his family history and his personal character we are in comparative ignorance, nor does the nature of his writings lend us an opportunity of deducing any internal evidence. It was only when the country had so far recovered from the licentious taste encouraged by Charles II., as to awaken to the beauties of the great bard, that a few admirers employed themselves in making enquiries concerning his theatrical career and his private life, a barren field however was all they found, with a few untrustworthy facts and contested traditions.

On comparing the stage of to-day even with that of the earlier part of this century we regret that there are undoubted signs of degeneracy, but to exactly place the root of this decline is a difficult task, let us investigate then and seek upon whom we may lay the blame, whether upon the player, the manager, or the theatre-going public. First as to the player, it is a matter of doubt whether the actors and actresses of this day as a class are to acknowledge, in any particular, inferiority to their illustrious predecessors of this century; true, the history of the drama is illuminated by such names as the Kembles, Keans, Macready, Siddons, and others, but their positions were vastly different from those of the same profession in this day. The plays which insured a success in that period

were those which were of such a latitude as to afford the actor an opportunity of producing all the power he possessed; were these, with a few exceptions, to be produced now they would be greeted with empty benches. How often do we see an artist of undoubted talent compelled by the force of circumstances to confine his talent within the limits of one of those evanescent trifles which are at present so popular; thus that talent which might have been used in the portrayal of real character and have become a source of lasting benefit, is dissipated in these tissues of unreality which leave behind them only negative impressions. We are just then in acquitting the actor as being in any way the cause of this decline. Next the long-suffering manager with his many trials and disappointments, he who produces the plays with only one aim before him, that of ministering to the varying tastes of the public so as to secure a financial success. His bread depends upon closely watching every indication of change in its inclinations and administering a suitable pabulum.

With safety then we may lay the blame at the door of the public. The drama of any age is only as the taste of that age moulds it, and the players and the managers are mere agents in presenting such dramas as the public have demanded. The majority of the plays produced during the last few years and which have been pronounced successes, in a few months sink into oblivion, not having so far established themselves in public favour as to have found their way to the press. The main cause of this display of taste may be imputed to the immense flood of light literature which has lately been poured into the book-market. There the average man is permitted to indulge so freely that craving for excitement which characterizes the present age, that he seeks it in a new form from the stage, and calls aloud for transformation scenes, for novelties in stage machinery and for everything which may convey pleasure to him through vision. Thus the substance of the play sinks into a secondary position and detail is the first point to be consulted.

Thence it follows that the main aim of the drama, namely, to present a faithful portrayal of human character and passion, is degraded into administering to the lightest inclinations of the multitude. This applies in the highest degree to that class of the drama known as melo-drama, where time after time the same hackneyed plot is rehearsed, a continual strain of persecuted innocence and virtue triumphant, which presents life in the falsest colours and under the most unhealthy aspects.

There are also a certain class of dramas for the most part of French origin, and partaking mostly of the comic element, in which all the nobler instincts of man's nature and even the holy relations of man and wife are utilized towards producing a ludicrous situation: the effect of witnessing a play of this nature is, or should be to any proper minded person, nauseating; what can there be in one of these, either instructive or elevating, when we see the