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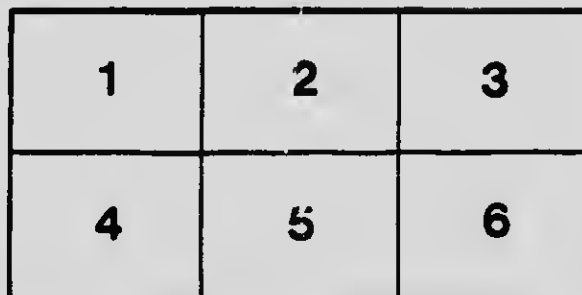
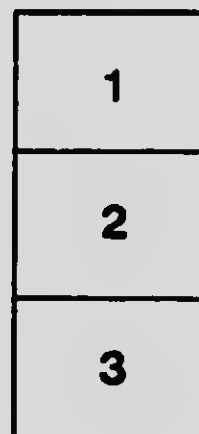
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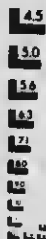
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The



**Ethical
Outlook
of the
Current
Drama**

...By...

Rev. J. C. Speer, D.D.





THEATRE OF DIONYSIUS, ATHENS.

THE ETHICAL OUTLOOK OF THE
CURRENT DRAMA.

BY

REV. J. C. SPEER, D.D.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE TORONTO GENERAL
MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION, TORONTO,
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THE ETHICAL OUTLOOK OF THE CURRENT DRAMA.

CHAPTER I.—THE DRAMA HISTORIC.

A BRIEF sketch of this institution in its historical manifestations may not be out of place here, as it may tend to give us a view point in this discussion which should be decidedly advantageous.

It need not be denied that the dramatic element, or histrionic instinct, is native to the race, and in various forms this fact can be detected even among the peoples most distinct from our own, in time and condition. To personate another, by actions, words and other modes of expression, is simply the mimetic power native in a lesser or greater degree to the human being in all conditions and stages of development. The war-dances of the savage, as well as the private theatrical of a Herod, the third act of which reached its climax in the murder of the Baptist, are evidences of this universal principle from widely-separated fields, and the examples might be multiplied indefinitely.

It may be here mentioned that only recently there has been a serious attempt made, by a competent historian, to produce a history of the drama from the earliest times. The first volume of this work has appeared; but, while it covers a vast period of time, it is little more than an outline, or sketch, of the subject. However, the author, Mr. Charles Hastings, late of University College, Bristol, has promised us another volume, and it is to be hoped that this one will deal with the subject from the standpoint of one who has interest in the matter other than the collection of bald historical facts, without regard to their relationship to the vital questions of social life.

The drama as an organized reality made its appearance about 500 B.C., and the name of Thespis has ever stood as father of the Greek tragedy. It will be seen, therefore, that the drama is of heathen origin, and the strain seems to have remained in the blood ever since.

It appears that the immediate object of those who were the creators of the Greek drama was political; but the instinct being strong in the nature of the Greek, the development along other and wider lines was rapid, so that many other elements of life were laid under tribute, to do duty to the object of the play-writer, and actor, of these early days.

It was true then, as perhaps it has never been since, that the drama at its birth had a serious purpose, and that purpose was of a national and patriotic character to a very great extent. To this

end religious mythology and poetry were brought to the garnishing of the play, and in later days the matters of private life were permitted to appear upon the stage.

In the earliest times the sexes were not allowed to mingle on the stage in the main parts of the role, but after a time this restriction was disregarded.

The stages upon which the early tragedies were enacted were in the open air, and the times were, for the most part, on the great calendar and feast days, and at times of great national rejoicings. On many of these occasions whole weeks were necessary to complete the play, so numerous and elaborate were the details to be observed.

Till the time of the introduction of the more exciting scenes of the race-course and the gladiatorial games, and the more bloody conflicts of the arena in which wild beasts, slaves, and latterly the Christians were slaughtered by the thousands, the theatre was most popular and growing to wonderful proportions; but when these more thrilling entertainments were made the rule of the Latin and Greek peoples, the full flush of the drama faded till the institution was wrecked and its downfall was accomplished as a controlling influence.

It is worthy of note that the moral influences of the drama were then a matter of comment, and such names as Plutarch, Xenophon, Plato, Socrates, Seneca and Ovid uttered their protests against the immoralities of the stage, on the ground that the morals of the

people made the nation strong or weak according as they were good or bad.

Here were men who knew nothing whatever of the morals of the Word of God, but who, from purely prudential reasons, protested against an institution which, so soon after its beginning, polluted the streams of social life to such an extent as to be considered a menace to the whole nation.

When Rome became the conqueror of the Greek nation she caught the contagion of the evils of the East, and when added to those which were distinctively her own, the conditions of the West cannot well be described. The transplanting of the drama to the Latin world injured the plant in nothing but in the fact that it was completely overshadowed for a time by the more brutal and exciting scenes to be witnessed in the arena; for why stay to see a mimic butchery on the stage, when the reality could be witnessed on the white sands dyed red by the blood of the slaughtered?

The Christian era dawned upon the world and cast its light upon the state of affairs as described above, and immediately Christianity cast down the gage of war against all that was contrary to the ethics of the Nazarene. The effect of this new, heaven-born element, cast into the measures of social meal was soon apparent; and as the light spread to those in high places in the empire, the more brutal became humane, and ultimately the bloody games of the arena disappeared.

But with the downfall of the savage slaughter of the arena came the revival of the drama, and it is indisputable that the infant Church found in the stage of the times one of the greatest obstacles to the work of overthrowing the immoralities of the heathen world, with all the attendant vices. In the second century A.D. the Church was organized and powerful, and the war against the immoralities of the drama was waged with great earnestness. The battle was a fierce one, and while the theatre dragged its life along for ages, the Church ceased not to hurl her anathemas upon it and its patrons, till the effects were most destructive to her heathen antagonist. It was near the close of the second century that the Church made an attempt to cut the ground from under the feet of her enemy by putting upon the stage scenes and plays of a religious character; but the success of this venture was indifferent if not evil, and in the long run rather favorable to the drama.

In the fifth century the embers which had been allowed to slumber for some time were again fanned into a flame, and the more powerful Church continued on the aggressive till, in the middle of the ninth century (A.D. 845), the theatre was extinct. On this point Hastings says: "From this epoch onward the drama, under the attacks of Christianity, . . . must be held to have expired." And yet the same religion in the twelfth century was to undertake the resurrection of that which it had effectively ruined. All

along these tedious centuries the conflict of the Church was against the drama, because of its ethical influence upon the people to whom the Church bore the message of the One who had distinctly said that even a look might be a violation of the ethics of His Gospel.

The close of the tenth century marks the advent of the religious drama in France, and there can be no question that this was a more serious attempt on the part of the Church to wean the people of the times from the Bacchanalian feasts and ceremonies; but the attempt was, as in earlier times, a dismal failure, and the latter case was worse than the former, for we find the most sacred subjects mingled with the most obscene, an evil which, by the way, has projected itself into the day in which we live.

Turning now for a moment to the English drama we find a state of affairs which is anything but inspiring. The scope of this paper will not warrant us in going behind the times of the Puritan movement against the drama of that day.

Whole volumes of dramatic Billingsgate have been poured upon the heads of the Puritans for their attitude toward the theatre of the times, and there can be no doubt that in their zeal they went too far in their condemnation of some things which were morally indifferent; but at the same time it has been shown most conclusively by writers of discriminating honesty and distinguished ability that the movement against the plays of the times was one that was war-

ranted, and that it was supported by the best men of the land who were removed to the farthest point from sympathy with these same Puritans. Charles Kingsley, in his chapter, or essay, on "Plays and Puritans," has dealt with this question in such a way as to throw light upon the condition of the drama of England in the sixteenth century, and also he there shows that the Puritans, while leaders in the iconoclastic movement against the drama, were not the only people of the times who stood horrified at the depths of iniquity to which this institution had descended. On page 14 he says: "But the fact is (and this seems to have been, like many other facts, conveniently forgotten) that the Puritans were by no means alone in their protest against the stage, and that the war was not begun exclusively by them. As early as the latter half of the sixteenth century not merely Northbrooks, Gosson, Stubbs and Reynolds had lifted up their voices against them, but Archbishop Parker, Bishop Babbington, Bishop Hall, and the author of 'The Mirror of Magistrates.' The University of Oxford in 1584 had passed a statute forbidding common plays and players in the University, on the very same moral grounds on which the Puritans objected to them. The city of London in 1580 had obtained from the Queen the suppression of plays on Sundays; and not long after, considering that play-houses and diceing-houses were traps for young gentlemen and others, they obtained from the Queen and Privy Council a law to thrust the players

out of the city, and to pull down the play-houses (five in number), and, paradoxical as it may seem, there is little doubt that by the letter of the law stage plays and interludes were even to the end of Charles I.'s reign unlawful pastime, being forbidden by statute. And the players were subjected to severe punishment as rogues and vagabonds. . . . So that the Puritans were only demanding of the sovereigns that they should enforce the very laws they themselves had made, and which they and the nobles were setting at defiance." Farther on he deals with the immoralities of these plays as follows: "The tragedies of the seventeenth century are on the whole as questionable as the comedies. That there are noble plays among them, here and there, no one denies, any more than that there were exquisitely amusing plays among the comedies; but as the staple interest of the comedies is dirt, so the staple interest of the tragedies is crime, revenge, hatred, villany, incest, and murder upon murder. These are their constant themes, and, with the exception of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson (in his earlier plays), and, perhaps, Massinger, they handle these horrors with little or no moral purpose, save that of exciting and amusing the audience and of displaying their own power of delineation in a way which makes one but too ready to believe the accusations of the Puritans, supported as they are by many ugly anecdotes, that the playwrights and actors were mostly men of fierce and reckless lives, who had but too practical an

acquaintance with the dark passions which they sketched."

Farther on in this essay Kingsley calls attention to the fact that so great was the evil complained of that the Church of England's baptismal service, for the adult, introduced the word "pomps," which he declares referred to the plays of the times. Here is his reference: "Prynne . . . declared these stage-plays to be among the very 'pomps' and vanities which Christians renounced at baptism." The Church of England had retained in her Catechism the old Roman word "pomps" as one of the things which were to be renounced, and, as pomps confessedly meant at first these very spectacles of the heathen circus and theatre, Prynne could not be very illogical in believing that, as it had been retained, it was retained to testify against *something*, and probably against the thing in England most like the "pomps" of heathen Rome.

Speaking further about the condition of the stage performances, Kingsley has the following to say: "The golden age of the English drama was one of private immorality, public hypocrisy, ecclesiastical pedantry and regal tyranny, and ended in the temporary downfall of Church and Crown." Speaking of the present times he says: "On the matter of the stage, the world has certainly come over to their (the Puritans) ways of thinking, for few highly-educated men now think it worth while to go to see any play, and that exactly for the same reasons as the Puritans put forward."

CHAPTER II.—THE MODERN DRAMA.

THESE quotations will perhaps place before us a brief outline of the history of the drama as it existed in those lands in the days that are gone, and it prepares us to attempt to answer the question as to the ethical outlook of the drama of the present day. For this part of the discussion it will serve all purposes to confine our attention to this continent, as there is but little, if any, difference in the moral tone of the theatre throughout the lands of the Anglo-Saxon tongue. Mr. Franklin Fyles, dramatic critic of the *New York Sun*, has recently given to the world a volume the title of which is, "The Theatre and Its People." In this book the moral question is practically ignored, and the value of the work will be more for the actor than for the public generally. However, he gives us the following figures, which may be of assistance: "There are," he says, "five thousand theatres in the United States and Canada." The value of these is set at \$100,000,000, though he thinks this is uncertain—the amount may be more or it may be less. Two thousand of these places are what he calls legitimate and three thousand illegitimate, running away down to the lowest type. These run for eight months of the twelve, and the intake of cash he sets at \$70,000,000 per the season. It may be said that these figures are much below those more frequently quoted, for some have given as high as

\$300,000,000 as the amount of the annual turn-over in cash by the theatres of the continent, and the number employed at fifty thousand. We are of the opinion that these figures are too high, and that a fair medium would be more correct. But that there are more than five thousand places where plays are carried on throughout the dramatic season we think is without doubt; but, be that as it may, these figures will serve to show that this is a mighty organization with unlimited capital behind it, and it must be a first-class dividend producer or it would long since have gone to the block.

If these places, which run for eight months of the year, are for good, they should be encouraged; and if they are for evil, how great is the menace to modern society. That they have no influence on either side will not be asserted, and therefore they are to be taken as an auxiliary or an enemy to the work of the Christian Church. It is to ascertain, as far as possible, the moral influence of this institution that we devote the balance of this paper.

It will be fair, we think, to place in the witness, box those who are not likely to be prejudiced witnesses as well as those who might be considered to be blinded to the good qualities of the defendant.

It may be well to remember that there were those in the first days of the history of the United States who felt that they were responsible to start the young nation on its course with firm foundations, and it was shortly after the Declaration of Indepen-

dence that the following was passed and incorporated as part of the constitution of that country: "Whereas, true religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness, resolved, that it be, and is hereby, earnestly recommended to the several States to take the most effectual measures for the encouragement thereof and the suppression of *theatrical* entertainments, horse-racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of indolence, dissipation and a general depravity of principles and manners." It must be admitted that the men who framed this law were not likely to be the fanatics who are generally supposed to oppose the modern drama. Perhaps the greatest and most lofty actor who ever trod the stage is Sir Henry Irving. Moreover, this gentleman has been the strongest advocate of the regeneration of the stage, and he stands with a challenge upon his lips to all who attack the stage of to-day. In 1881 he delivered a lecture at the sessional opening of the Philosophical Institution in Edinburgh, on the topic, "The Stage As It Is." I quote from this lecture, page 6: "The theatre of fifty years ago or less *was* reformed; if there are any, therefore, as I fear there are a few, who still talk on this point in the old vein, let them rub their eyes a bit and do us the justice to consider, not what used to be, but what is. But may there be moral contamination from what is performed on the stage? Well, there may be; but so there is from *books*, so there may be; at *lawn tennis clubs*, so there may be

at dances, so there may be in connection with everything in civilized life and society, but do we therefore bury ourselves? . . . Depend upon two things—that the theatre, as a whole, is never below the average moral sense of the time, and that the inevitable demand for an admixture, at least of wholesome sentiment, in every sort of dramatic production, brings the ruling tone of the theatre, whatever drawback may exist, up to the highest level at which the general morality of the time can truly be registered. . . . I should acknowledge eagerly and gladly that with few exceptions the public no longer debar themselves from the profitable pleasures of the theatres, and no longer brand with any social stigma the professors of the histrionic art. There never was so large a number of theatres or of actors, and their type is vastly improved by public recognition." Page 16: "It will be quite hopeless to attempt to induce the generality of a purely artistic class to make louder and more fussy professions of virtue and religion than other people. In fact, it is a downright insult to the dramatic profession to exact or to expect any such thing. Equally objectionable and equally impracticable are the attempts of dramatic reformers to exercise a sort of goody-goody censorship over the selection and the text of the plays to be acted. The stage has been serving the world for hundreds, yes, and thousands, of years, during which it has contributed in pure dramaturgic literature of the world its very greatest masterpieces, in nearly all languages,

meanwhile affording to the million an infinity of pleasure all more or less innocent; where less innocent rather than more, the cause has lain, not in the stage, but in the state of society of which it was the mirror."

Here let us put against this latter statement the fact that history proves that the theatre has persistently refused to reflect the laws of the land, the claims of the Christian Church; and the lowest conditions of human life, and not the highest, have, in the past, formed the staples of the most popular performances. On page 26, from which we quote, Sir Henry goes on to say: "There never was a time when the stage had not conspicuous faults. . . . Heaven forbid that I should seem to cover with a counterpane of courtesy, exhibitions of deliberate immorality." On page 31 he further says: "If you uphold the theatre honestly, liberally and frankly, and with wise discrimination, that stage will uphold in future as it has in the past the literature, the manners, the morals, the fame, and the genius of our country."

It is not unfair to here call attention to the fact that Sir Henry utterly ignores the fact that all history is against the statement that the stage has upheld the manners and morals of the world. This fact vitiates the whole lecture, or that portion of it at least given up to a defence of the immoral influences charged against it as an institution. It is as evident as anything can be, that notwithstanding

the fact that this is perhaps the greatest genius who ever adorned the stage in the role of the tragic, he is utterly unacquainted with the moral phases of this question, for we cannot think that he would attempt to cover up what has been and what is so evident to all who take the slightest interest in such matters. This great man lives in the transcendental realms of the drama, and he evidently has no occasion to come in contact with the life of the third, fourth or fifth grade play-houses, which are, after all, the most numerous and influential in the world.

It is in place just here to remind ourselves that the superlative actor, Edwin Booth, spent a large fortune in an attempt to run a theatre on the most lofty plane, eliminating from its stage everything which, on moral grounds, could offend the most fastidious; but the venture was a dismal failure. But what is more to the point, it is a fact that Sir Henry Irving himself, with most laudable motives, repeated the attempt in London only a few years ago, thinking that the present generation would support, in such a metropolis as London, the Shakespearian drama when glorified by the lofty genius which he was prepared to lay upon the altar of his art; but the experience of Booth became the experience of his illustrious successor, and the financial failure swept away the fortune of Sir Henry so completely that a subscription was in order to reimburse the philanthropic tragedian. It is possible that had Sir Henry delivered the lecture, from which we have quoted above,

since the experiment to which we have referred, some of the statements therein would not now be uttered.

We do not wish it to be understood that we are of the opinion that the drama cannot be reformed, nor that there are no valuable elements in many of the plays ever before the public; but that the reformation of the drama, so that it will chime with the ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, has so far never been an accomplished fact, and the efforts along that line, as noted above, are tremendously significant.

But lest it should be supposed that a partial witness is on the stand, let us hear from those who have no cause to support the Puritans in their attitude toward the evils of the current drama.

In the *Vanity Fair* magazine of New York, March, 1900, there appeared an article written by one Fred. Vilas in answer to an appeal from one who signed himself "A Well-known Actor." The appeal was to use the influence of the magazine, which was published in the interests of the dramatic profession, to answer the aspersions which had been cast upon the actors by a Chicago correspondent. In answer to this appeal the magazine writer has the following to say: "After having lived and worked in the theatrical profession for many years, and drawing every just or consistent induction or deduction from what I have experienced or learned, only one conclusion can be reached, and that is, that actors, as a general rule, have absolutely no regard for women;

that they are uneducated, in the full sense of the word, indocile, indomitable, vain, conceited and selfish, and instead of leading lives after a standard of morals, exist after ethics which may be properly termed a code of immorals.

"The average actor . . . is not alone unfit for the society of men and women in general, but is equally as much out of place among those women of the stage who *would* lead upright lives were it not for the advantages taken by the men who, were they gentlemen, would act as their protectors. It is only a few months ago that an English critic created a sensation by denouncing the women of the stage as immoral. There are certainly many immoral women who appear behind the foot-lights every night—there are, of course, in other walks of life also—but if this critic had even attempted to vindicate the unfortunate set, he might have consistently gone as far as the root of the evil, where he would have found that the lewd women of the stage were generally made so by the actors with whom they were compelled to associate, and not by the environs and generally supposed temptations of a professional career." But we submit these actors are part of the environs of this career. Farther on this writer says: "The average actor is not alone unpopular in the ordinary middle class society, but among those women of the stage who have reached sufficient prominence to demand big salaries. When they reach this height in their career, in nine cases out of ten they will frankly tell

you that they never associate with actors. Marriage, in most cases, is regarded by them as an idle fancy. I can pick out ten actors in twenty minutes who have had more than one wife, several have had three, while others have had as many as four. In fact, some of them curtail their expenses just before going for a long season on the road by marrying some member of the company, living with her until the company disbands, and then, during the summer, allowing her ample opportunity to get evidence for divorce proceedings."

It has been said that this article was written for advertising purposes, and that it is a fiction and in no sense true to facts; but any one who reads the article will see a very different purpose, and, while we would hope that this condition is overdrawn, still, the evidence of sincerity and wide knowledge of the facts of the case are present in the work of this writer. The writer does not appear in the role of an opponent of the theatre, but as one who was disgusted at the life and character of the "average actor," and if it is a misrepresentation of the moral condition of the actor, you have to condemn the magazine for its publication, and not the present writer, who has simply quoted these paragraphs.

But this is not the only unbiassed writer of our times who has assailed the morals of the theatre of this age. I quote from the pages of the *Metropolitan Magazine* an article under the heading, "The Licentious Drama; or, Is the American Stage

Degenerate?" This writer says: "There is reason to hope that the public has been aroused finally, if tardily, to action against a condition that was bringing sure disgrace to the stage in this country. For a long time there has existed a rapidly increasing tendency toward suggestive, indecent and revolting themes, incidents and conversations in dramas, farce and musical comedies, and our theatres were already abreast of the French play-house, held up for generations as the pre-eminent example of all that was offensive and degraded in the amusement world. The pace was growing appallingly fast. The appetite for unclean theatricals had been held well in check by public opinion up to four or five years ago, when the first taste for them was admitted without serious protest in the form of a farce imported from Paris. The experiment was enormously profitable, and the theatre managers, perceiving that it was unpunished, began a systematic and sweeping search for material that would appeal to the prurient." Farther on this writer says: "It is not alone against the serious plays of a low moral character that the country is at last aroused. There has been a great quantity of stage material put forward with the idea of provoking hilarity upon the lines of indecency almost beyond credence. No play patrons of ten years ago would possibly be induced to believe such farces as 'The Gay Parisians,' 'The Turtle,' 'The Girl from Maxim's,' 'Corelie & Co., Dressmakers,' or any one of a dozen others that might be named, could ever in this epoch find

secure footing before the American public." It is beyond the space of this pamphlet to quote more than a few lines from this lengthy article, but we have given a glimpse of the condition of affairs as they are said to exist, for it must be remembered that these plays are still before the public, and some of the plays here condemned because of their immoral nature are still given throughout the land, with thousands of people being corrupted by their influences. Further this magazine article says: "It is held for a Camillia, a Zaza, a Mrs. Tanquery, or a Sapho to come from the dregs, and parade the sufferings she has richly earned, to touch the wellspring of tender feeling, and overflow the sluices of lachrymal sympathy."

The editor of this magazine appends the following note to this article: "The foregoing article was submitted to the *Metropolitan Magazine* by one who knows the stage and its people as a mother knows her offspring or an actor his pay-day. Accompanying the article was a comment to the effect that since the public does not care to have its idols shattered or its pet theatrical productions bluntly criticised, the ruthless integrity of the writer's words would doubtless be rewarded by consignment to the waste-basket. The editor of the *Metropolitan Magazine* does not believe that the theatre-going public is averse to hearing the truth about the stage or any of its concerns, and that when plain facts are given in plain terms no intelligent person can be offended.

"To this end, then, the article, dealing with a phase

of theatredom prominently brought before the public during the past season, is given here intact and un-abridged. What is said about the salacious plays is so true that the presentment admits of no contradiction by the well-informed and the just. It is the province of a periodical of the high standing of the *Metropolitan Magazine* to criticise existing conditions of life and art, no less than to offer to the reading public an array of interesting literature and engaging illustrations."

Perhaps I may be pardoned if I take time to quote from another journal of standing, and one which will not be accused of Puritanic leanings, but one which has the following to say on the moral condition of the average theatre. The *New York Press* utters these words: "There is entirely too much nastiness and immorality in real life to make it desirable to reproduce them upon the stage. The stage was meant to portray human nature in its best moods, for, if the better mood is not the fitly surviving mood, then human nature perishes into brute nature. The drama of the hour is artificial; it panders to the passions, to nervous greed, for excitement, to eroticism. Instead of teaching a moral, it mocks our tested notions of morality. Instead of teaching humanity that good is preferable to evil, it makes light of virtue and places vice in an alluring light of epigrammatic raillery."

Here is an article clipped from a Toronto paper dealing with the dramatic bill-board, which, if true to the patrons of the theatre, must tell in a pictorial way

what is placed upon the stage in living reality before the eyes of the thousands who throng our play-houses: "The play-bills in many of our cities and towns are schools of vice. It is almost impossible to go down town at any time without seeing representations of crime that cannot fail to be suggestive to the young. Pictures of one man pointing a pistol at another are so common as to excite little comment. That they have a very bad influence upon boys and young men is more than probable. To handle a revolver skilfully seems to many a youth rather a manly thing to do, and the ambition to own a fire-arm is stimulated by pictures which we see every day. Many homes have no works of art upon the walls to exercise a refining and elevating tendency upon the family. Their only art gallery, the bill-boards, is carefully studied. Even those who never think of attending the plays that are advertised, are nevertheless unconsciously influenced by what the eye rests upon every day." We are prepared to endorse every word of this article.

We quote from the *Century Magazine* of August 1895, on the principal cause of this condition of affairs in the dramatic world. There can be no doubt that there are many in the profession who are far below the level of sound morals, but the most fruitful cause of the evils complained of in these selections is to be laid at the door of the managers who are in the business for the dividends they can declare and that regardless of the methods pursued. However, here is

what the *Century Magazine* has to say on that point. After calling attention to the fact that "managerial ignorance, vulgarity and greed are more largely responsible for current theatrical evils than all other causes put together," the writer continues: "It will be understood, of course, that this arraignment does not apply to the four or five managers in the United States (there are no more of them) who live up to a creditable standard of literary and dramatic excellence, but to the illiterate and only partially civilized speculators who, by their commercial enterprise, audacity and astuteness—admirable qualities in their way—have secured control of nearly all the theatres and conduct them upon the principles which in better days were confined to the music halls and the circus. . . . The nature of the entertainment is to them a matter of most profound indifference. They are ready to deal in theatrical goods of any description, from a Shakespearian revival to the lowest type of melodrama, from the Passion Play to the coarsest of French farces or the most idiotic variety-shows, if only somebody has made money out of them somewhere else."

Dr. J. M. Buckley, editor of the *New York Christian Advocate*, personally examined no less than sixty different plays of the best theatres of New York during three seasons, and he states that fifty of these plays were actually immoral, while the balance, with three or four exceptions, were of a low order of merit; and Prof. H. M. Scott, writing in the "*Bibliotheca Sacra*,"

Vol. 42, p. 71, says: "The favorite dramas of Germany now come from France, and 99 per cent. of them hinge upon matrimonial infidelity. One vile play has been given over three hundred times in Berlin." In his comment on this statement, Rev. Perry W. Sinks has this to say: "Some of our cities have out-Paris'd Paris itself in disgraceful plays, as they have out-Londoned London in the matter of Living Picture exhibitions. The introduction of immoral plays and their accompaniments has accelerated the fast youth of the country in a whirlwind of immorality which is truly appalling. Our American cities are little, if any, behind London, Paris, Berlin, and other European cities which have long borne a reputation for lewdness and immorality."

Here, then, is an institution, hoary with years and colossal in proportions, organized for commercial purposes, and run, for the most part, by a corporation of capitalists with headquarters at New York. This firm, we are informed on the best of authority, is made up of those who find it difficult to use the Anglo-Saxon tongue, and who are said to have absolutely no regard for the morals taught in the New Testament.

According to one authority already quoted, there are not less than five thousand places where dramatic performances are conducted for the dramatic season of eight months of the year. The authorities say that the moral influences of many of these plays are bad. Many good people go to these places because they find there something to aid them in

passing the time, and there is, in all such places, the element of merriment which, if of a healthy character, is most beneficial to the jaded people of city life. The only other healthy element present in the average theatre of to-day is that of the artistic. But who will say that this is at all in the thought of the managerial tyrants at New York or elsewhere, when the one thought of their brains is how to declare dividends for the stockholders. If the drama were to give itself to the matter of pure art and entertainment, and blacklist everything that fell below the line morally, then the world would be the better of what the play-house has to give; but so far from this being the ideal we are confronted, in every city and town where there is a play-house, with the most outrageous violations of decency to be found anywhere in society. The public execution of criminals had to be abandoned because such scenes were most demoralizing to a class ever present and ever susceptible to evil effects, and we cannot but think that the presentation of crimes, such as are depicted upon the bill-boards of every city and town on this continent, and then, in a more realistic way, on the stages of all our theatres, forms a school system for the teaching of vice and crime which must result in the lowering of the moral standard of the nation to an extent that we have not yet fully appreciated.

Theft, assault, hypocrisy, domestic infidelity, eroticism, duplicity, murder and suicide form the staple of the themes which have passed, and are ever passing,

across the stages of the play-houses of this land. In order to portray such scenes as these the lowest vulgarity, the basest suggestions, and the most obscene actions are demanded by the managers, and, in too many cases, by a considerable section of the audience. It must not be supposed that all plays are bad nor that all actors of either sex are depraved. This is certainly not the case, for we have no doubt there are not a few in this profession who have kept themselves untainted, and even some of those who have, through necessity, descended to the base, have, through it all, longed for the purer, moral, and more lofty artistic atmosphere in the histrionic world. But the dominating thought of the amusement caterer is to make the play go, fill the chairs, and the coffers of the company regardless of the tastes of the actor, or the public, or that portion of it who take an interest in the morality of the nation.

A word in conclusion as to the best methods of meeting the condition of affairs herein described. The people who spend so much money and time on the training of the youth, should spend more on the removal of those influences which are ever undoing what the Church and the home have labored to accomplish. The boy is at the Sunday School for two hours out of the week, while he is for the other days studying the obscene theatrical pictures on the street. Would not common sense dictate a crusade against that which makes your work of no effect?

This will rest with equal force against the youth of

both sexes who have the teaching of the Church for one day in seven, while for several nights in the week they study in the theatre that which is at the very antipodes, morally, of what was taught from the Word of God. Would it not pay to give a little time to the destruction of these forces that the good might have a better chance to develop? This can be accomplished by wide, united and persistent efforts to have proper laws placed upon the statute books and then effectively enforced. If we enforce the laws against contagious disease where the bodies of men are endangered, should we not be as faithful and persistent in the enforcement of laws against the moral contagion, which destroys the soul? There is a need for public sentiment to be aroused and kept at a white heat on moral questions, for, when the average official feels that public opinion is not with him in the enforcement of the law, he is more than likely to place the glass to the blind eye.

But all this will not be found sufficient to counteract the influence of the theatre and kindred institutions. One thing is sure, the Church has been too slow to recognize the fact that the people must have amusement and entertainment. It is absolutely certain that no soul can be what it should be if life runs along in the rut of toil without the tonic of laughter and lightsome entertainment. It may be said that this has always been admitted, but we answer, no: the most part only in theory. Athletics have, only recently, been introduced into the life of the Christian,

and it is not long since the concert hall could count upon the most pious of the community.

The most mighty force to be brought against the immoral play-house is the gospel as preached from the home and the Church, but it must be backed up by clean, inspiring, up-to-date entertainment, held in halls convenient to the people, conducted upon sound commercial principles, with admission so low that the wage-worker and his wife and family can, at least once a week, take the rest and relaxation so necessary for his tired muscles and also for her tingling nerves.

When Dr. Wilbur F. Crafts, Superintendent of the International Reform Bureau, was asked for something to counteract the low theatre he outlined the above plan—not a new one, of course, but one which has yet to receive the support of the Church as it should.

The average church entertainment is altogether too irregular, and too often the local talent is selected because it costs nothing, and such efforts have no more effect against the regular, thoroughly equipped, and moneyed theatre, than a flake of snow has under the wheel of the fast express on a down grade. This is a mighty power which has never been fully tested, and which will yet meet one side of human nature now captive to the demoralizing drama.

