

found in a measure that refinement for which he was searching. He has succeeded in increasing the size of the canvases on which he works; but it has all been at the expense of that "verity," the hall-mark of the school which he created, and of the rich, red-blooded flow of spontaneous melody which goes straight from the heart of the composer to the heart of the hearer. The fairest conclusion to

make now is that, led away by his sudden fame and bitten by the desire for notoriety, he has been following false gods for twelve years. He may find himself again, and if he does, if he gets back to the soil which gave him his great inspiration, we may look for another work which will bring glory to himself and honour to the land of his birth.

W. E. Walter.

## THE DRAMA OF THE MONTH



Any review of the month must begin abruptly with Mr. Pinero, and it might end with him, too, without any gross misappropriation of space. His new play, *Iris*, has been the chief dramatic topic over here, and in England there has been a stirring debate over a point you would never dream of—the moral influence of *The Gay Lord Quex*. A character like Quex ought never, said Sir Edward Russell, to be placed upon the stage, because, as a profligate who was let off easy, he might beckon us all to his evil courses. "One could not be 'on the side of the angels,'" he declared, "if one enjoyed *con amore* the hard vileness of Lord Quex—or even the play in which the *roué* hero dominated." To which Mr. Pinero retorted that Quex had his good points, and there were people like him; and thenceforth the discussion ran on the general question, was the stage the place for things as they ought to be or for things as they sometimes are. This raising of moral questions over *The Gay Lord Quex*, or, indeed, over *Iris* or any of Pinero's later plays, is more puzzling to the public than their guardians suspect. It would seem that the souls of us ordinary playgoers run constantly the most hairbreadth escapes, all without our knowing it; and we stay through things in our placid, middle-aged innocence when, as we find out afterward, we should have rushed from the place. The present is so good an in-

stance that we cannot let it pass. What was the matter with Quex? He had, says the critic, "no inner well of pure susceptibility," and the dramatist did not punish him. That is the reason why we should not enjoy the play. Assuming that Quex lacked that "inner well," the reason would apply to *Vanity Fair* if Thackeray had made Becky prosper, to the best parts of Shakespeare (the inner well in Falstaff was full of sack), to *Paradise Lost*, where Satan is notoriously the poet's favourite. Charles Lamb facetiously denounced the moral of *The School for Scandal* because the hero did not pay his debts. That kind of thing is done in all seriousness now.

This would seem like a discussion of wine on the White House table, or skirts for the statues of Venus, were it not for the fact that men like Sir Edward Russell and Mr. William Winter so often bring it up. When an eminent critic who knows ten times as much about the stage as you do compares some of your favourite plays to cesspools and says if you like them it is merely because you enjoy cesspools, it certainly is disquieting. And the mildest protest brings down on your head a moral cudgel, for it is assumed that if you disagree as to the evil effects of a particular play you are by nature a lover of all that is vile. A man must carry an enormous ethical surplus to worry over the effect on his neighbour's morals of a play like *The Gay Lord Quex*. It would

be a very tottering neighbour whom Quex could overthrow. The man or woman whom such things damage is already past the saving, and if the community is in danger from Pinero the warning comes too late. There is nothing more purely personal than those zigzag lines of propriety these writers draw. It is a sort of private, haphazard prudery, as if one were conscientious by jerks and then amazingly overdid it.

In *Iris* no one can complain that the wrongdoer has too easy a time of it. The play is a study in retribution. *Iris*, the leading character, is a young widow, to whom her husband has left a fortune on condition that she shall not marry again, and who, being the slave of her senses and dependent on what her money brings her, lacks the courage to give up her fortune and marry the man she loves. Wavering between prudence and passion, she dismisses the impecunious lover and betroths herself to a millionaire, but promptly recalls him and, breaking her promise to the other, becomes clandestinely her lover's mistress. She will neither marry him nor let him go, and cannot understand his compunctions, since her wealth is sufficient for both. Then comes the news of the loss of her fortune through the dishonesty of a trustee, and now that she is as poor as he is, he renews his plea, urging her to go with him to British Columbia, where he has a chance of making his way. Again she refuses, this time on the ground of self-sacrifice, the fear of being a burden and the fancied need of an expiation by facing her poverty alone. In his absence the millionaire, Maldonado, shadows her and contrives that at every turn his money shall seem her only refuge. He is brutal, coarse, cunning, but a man of force and passion, a descendant of Spanish Jews, a successful financier, or as it is defined in the play, a "pawnbroker with imagination." Repugnant to her in every way, he draws her by his money, and at last she lives openly with him as his mistress. He, too, would make her his wife, but through all she believes her other lover will return some day and rescue her. He does return, but only to leave her on hearing her confession; and Maldonado, who has secretly watched their meeting, is enraged by this evidence of her continued

love for the other and turns her into the street.

This bald outline serves only to show the shabby tale on which Pinero built. As to the play itself, it is built with such deftness, reasonableness and truth that people who feel a discontent with the whole have been obliged to fall back on the plot to account for it. This is perhaps unnecessary. The plot of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, if stated drily, seems quite as uninspiring, but it is incomparably the better play. The difference is in the conception of the leading character. It was not merely that Paula in the earlier play was fighting against her fate and *Iris* yielding to it, but Paula was a woman about whom you cared, a woman of variety, fancy, wit and charm. The author gave her lines to prove it. Poor *Iris* was meanly endowed. Her supposed attractiveness was indicated indirectly by the reports of her friends. She herself gave no sign of it, and did not speak a word that won your sympathy, save as suffering wins your sympathy, mere brute suffering, which is not enough to make a tragedy. Each was a vessel of wrath; but Paula was at least porcelain with a flaw in it and *Iris* the merest crockery. Tragedy lies in the spiritual value of the thing injured, and there is no poignancy in seeing *Iris* go to smash. Here, it seems to us, as in historical novels, the writer thinks too much of the things that happen, too little of the people they happen to. Build a character that appeals to us and we shall be sorry if he pricks his finger, but a mere peg for pathos requires no end of agonising details.

This judgment would be manifestly unfair if one let Virginia Harned's rendering conceal the capacities of the part. She turns moral weakness into spiritlessness. She plays it droopingly, with convalescent flashes, as if she had copied Bernhardt's *Camille* and forgot to leave out the consumption. Pinero's *Iris* is at least physically sound, and in places she might have been represented as normally active and cheerful. It was played in the main monotonously, but with here and there, especially at emotional crises, a real effectiveness. As the newspapers have already said, the chief feature of the New York presentation was the Maldonado of Mr. Asche. It was a part compounded

of well-known elements, suggesting half a dozen types in recent fiction, but modelled on no single one. With an air of reserved power sufficient to account for his success, with a touch of coarseness to explain the repulsion, he marched through the play as just the right sort of a vulgar Nemesis. Mr. Asche used every advantage that the author gave him, and produced an effect that was both strong and complex, accounting fully for his sinister mastery in that moral china shop by the force of his will and passions.

While Virginia Harned was taxed beyond her powers, Mrs. Patrick Campbell in Benson's play, *Aunt Jeannie*, was finding little or nothing at all commensurate with her abilities. The play depended for its interest solely on its *Dodo* dialogue and farce elements. Epigram in its mechanical form was frequent, as in the pages of *Dodo*: "I make it a point never to be seen with my husband; it is not decent," one of the characters says. Is not that familiar? And other moral truisms were inverted with equal skill: "People without a past always believe in a future." But it rose above this at several points, especially in the cheerful nonsense of a certain scatter-brained clubman, a part played with much success by R. C. Herz. The praise of Mrs. Campbell in this rôle only shows how good work may carry over and colour the judgment of the observer. Seen for the first time in this play, Mrs. Campbell would seem merely an open question. The good looks and gracious manner you could be sure of, but anything beyond this would have to be inferred from her work elsewhere. And there was about her a certain lack of trimness for a fascinating woman of fashion. She did not seem well set up. Her costume was too emotional and her postures were too Cleopatra-like. She was too willowy to be fashionable, and would surely have been a wallflower if she had appeared like that. And John Blair as a light-minded, horse-racing nobleman, with his orotund Anglican voice, seemed also a little out of his element.

Of the two French plays produced here during the month, *There's Many a Slip*, Robert Marshall's English version of Scribe and Legouvé's old comedy, was mainly interesting in showing the advance that has been made, in spite of

everything, in mere theatrical devices. The old tricks look decidedly queer. There was no particular reason for reviving this stage commonplace of our ancestors, and in spite of a very fair presentation with Miss Jessie Millward in the leading part, it gave no promise of permanence. The other, Alfred Capus's light comedy of *The Two Schools*, was promptly damned in certain quarters for its immorality, and if you took its teaching seriously it certainly was abominable. The only excuse for not smiting it is the difficulty of taking seriously what is in effect half farce. Conjugal infidelity is the theme, and it happens in the play that all the faithless husbands are good fellows, and the only man who shows any signs of rectitude is a hypocrite unmasked in the end and mercilessly ridiculed. The moral for a young wife is that she must shut her eyes to her husband's misdoings, because she must "choose between passion and fidelity;" and for the husband, that so far as possible he must cover his traces. But it is so preposterous a theme for the American stage that it seems a mere mischievous paradox with which conscience has no more business than with the misdeeds of Pierrot in the pantomime. And since it is written lightly and with many clever turns of phrase, and played without the least suggestion of coarseness by an exceptionally good company, it will be hard to make people understand why they ought not to see it.

To pass to an opposite extreme, *The Rose o' Plymouth Town* has been blamed by some for its innocence as a "drama of pussy-willows and pop-corn." As a matter of fact, it is quite as forcible and quite as well-built as many plays that have had long runs and have been well spoken of. By some caprice the gaps and bad logic of some plays are lightly passed over and of another are assailed ferociously. In this instance the point of attack was the inconsistency of the heroine's character in inciting her two lovers to fight a duel and promising a kiss to the victor. If we condemned plays for that degree of improbability where should we end? *The Rose o' Plymouth Town* is marred by certain crudities, but there are many suggestions in the lines that the present company does not do it justice.

Frank Moore Colby.

# THE BOOKMAN'S LETTER-BOX



## I.

When we wrote a little paragraph about the late Lord Acton some time ago we had no premonition of the fact that we were rushing right into trouble. But we were. No one has objected to our estimate of his lordship's ability; but our casual mention of him as a "Catholic," *tout court*, has stirred up a lot of people with a theological twist in their minds, and they have written us letters—many letters. These are all too long to publish in full, nor do they wholly tend to edification in their lack of Christian charity and the milk of human kindness. But one of them asks a question; so we shall print the question and answer it.

Why do you refer to a member of the Romish Church as a "Catholic," as though that Church had any special and peculiar claim to Catholicity?

Because when we write, we like to express ourselves in our own way.

## II.

Another gentleman, addressing us on the same subject, is patient with us, but argumentative. In fact, he used up all his writing paper before he had finished what he wanted to say; so that he had to cross his lines and write in the margin and around the corners. He also drew a sort of diagram for us, in which Old Catholics and Reformed Catholics (whatever they are) and Greek Catholics and various other kinds of Catholics figure in large letters opposite a huge interrogation point. We don't know exactly what it all means, but it is really rather impressive and confusing. Then he says at the end:

Of course I know that Lord Acton was a

Catholic, and I also know what you meant when you said that he was a Catholic; but that is apart from the real question.

Yes; but is it? If you knew that he was a Catholic, and if you also knew what we meant when we said that he was a Catholic, then we have a pretty comfortable sort of conviction that we really filled the bill.

## III.

A lady writing from Joliet, Illinois, asks:

Did you ever see the take-off on you and your disagreeable, supercilious Letter-Box, in a pamphlet published out here, called *The Book-Booster*?

Of course we did. It was pretty good, too, wasn't it?

## IV.

From Saratoga, New York:

In the *Chronicle and Comment* of last month it was said that *Rory* was the last novel written by the late Edward Eggleston. This is incorrect, for he wrote several others of still later date than *Rory*—among them *The Hoosier Schoolboy* and *Duffels*. *Duffels* was really the last. I write you about this, thinking that you may not have read these books or that you may have forgotten them.

We did read them at the time, but we forgot them when we wrote the paragraph *currente calamo*. However, to forget them was a charitable, pious act, for which we have no apologies to make.

## V.

Here is something a little out-of-the-way and verging upon the occult. It is