

Editor's Easy Chair.

A FRIEND of the Unreal Editor came into this department, the other day, after a frost from the Real Editor in the Study, which had nipped a tender manuscript in its bloom, and was received by the Unreal Editor with the easy hospitality he is able to show the rejected from a function involving neither power nor responsibility. This has won him the reputation of a kindly nature, all over the country, so that the Disappointed appeal to him everywhere, and try to have him get their things into the magazine under the Real Editor's guard. He always fails, but that does not discourage the Disappointed. They come back with fresh offerings, and they apparently incite others to join them in showering the Unreal Editor with MSS. of every kind and degree, in verse, prose, and that middle species which is beginning to get itself called rhythm. This is the moment when his punishment begins, for he is obliged either to write personally to the Disappointed and the would-be-Disappointed, or silently turn their things in to the Study, where the Real Editor deals with them by printed circular. The heart of the hospitable illusion aches in doing this, but, except in the rarest cases, he does it, for life is short, and the art of the contributor is long.

"Ah!" the Unreal Editor breathed sadly at the sight of the wilted offering in the hands of his friend. "What is it he won't take *now*?"

"Wait till I get my second wind," the victim of unrequited literature answered, dropping into the Easy Chair, from which the illusion had risen; and he sighed pensively, "I felt so sure I had got him, this time." He closed his eyes, and leaned his head back against the uncomfortably carved top of the Easy Chair. It was perhaps his failure to find rest in it that restored him to animation. "It is a little thing," he murmured, "on the decline of the vaudeville."

I

"The decline of the vaudeville?" the Unreal Editor repeated, wrinkling his forehead in grave misgiving. Then, for

want of something better, he asked, "Do you think that is a very dignified subject for the magazine?"

"Why, bless my soul!" the rejected one cried, starting somewhat violently forward, "what is your magazine itself but vaudeville. with your contributors all doing their stunts of fiction, or poetry, or travel, or sketches of life, or articles of popular science and sociological interest, and I don't know what all! What are your illustrations but the moving pictures of the kalatechnoscope! Why," he said, with inspiration, "what are you, and your associate there in the Study—"

"My chief, if you please," the Unreal Editor loyally corrected him.

He did not mind. "What are you, I should like to know, but a species of Chasers that come at the end of the show, and help clear the ground for the next month's performance by tiring out the lingering readers?"

"You don't think," the editor suggested, "you're being rather unpleasant?"

His friend laughed harshly, and the editor was glad to see him restored to so much cheerfulness, at any rate. "I think the notion is a pretty good fit, though if you don't like to wear it I don't insist. Why should you object to being likened to those poor fellows who come last on the programme at the vaudeville? Very often they are as good as the others, and sometimes, when I have determined to get my five hours' enjoyment to the last moment before six o'clock, I have had my reward in something unexpectedly delightful in the work of the Chasers. I have got into close human relations with them, I and the half-dozen brave spirits who have stuck it out with me, while the ushers went impatiently about, clacking the seats back, and picking up the programmes and lost articles under them. I have had the same sense of kindly comradeship with you and your neighbor, and now and then my patience has been rewarded by you, just as it has been by the Chasers at the vaudeville, and I've said so to people. I've said, 'You're wrong to put down the magazine the way most of you do before you get to those depart-

ments at the end. Sometimes there are quite good things in them.'"

"Really," said the editor, "you seem to have had these remarks left over from your visit to the Study. I advise you to go back and repeat them. They may cause the editor to revise his opinion of your contribution."

"It's no use my going back. I read finality in your neighbor's eye before I left him, and I feel that no compliment, the most fulsome, would move him. Don't turn me out! - I take it all back, about your being a Chaser. You are the first act on the bill for me. I read the magazine like a Chinese book from the back. I always begin with the Easy Chair."

"Ah, now you are talking," the editor said, and he thought it no more than human to ask, "What is it you have been saying about the vaudeville, anyway?"

The rejected one instantly unfolded his manuscript. "I will just read—"

"No, no!" the editor interposed. "Tell me about it—give me the general drift. I never can follow anything read to me."

The other looked incredulous, but he was not master of the situation, and he resigned himself to the secondary pleasure of sketching the paper he would so much rather have read.

"Why, you know what an inveterate vaudeville-goer I have always been?"

The editor nodded. "I know how you are always trying to get me to neglect the masterpieces of our undying modern dramatists, on the legitimate stage, and go with you to see the ridiculous stunts you delight in."

"Well, it comes to the same thing. I am an inveterate vaudeville-goer, for the simple reason that I find better acting in the vaudeville, and better drama, on the whole, than you ever get, or you generally get, on your legitimate stage. I don't know why it is so very legitimate. I have no doubt but the vaudeville, or continuous variety performance, is the older, the more authentic form of histrionic art. Before the Greek dramatists, or the longer-winded Sanskrit playwrights, or the exquisitely conventionalized Chinese and Japanese and Javanese were heard of, it is probable that there were companies of vaudeville artists going about the country and doing the turns that they had invented themselves, and

getting and giving the joy that comes of voluntary and original work, just as they are now. And in the palmiest days of the Greek tragedy or the Roman comedy, there were of course variety shows all over Athens and Rome where you could have got twice the amusement for half the money that you would at the regular theatres. While the openly wretched and secretly rebellious actors whom Euripides and Terence had cast for their parts were going through rôles they would never have chosen themselves, the wilding heirs of art at the vaudeville were giving things of their own imagination, which they had worked up from some vague inspiration into a sketch of artistic effect. No manager had foisted upon them his ideals of 'what the people wanted,' none had shaped their performance according to his own notion of histrionics. They had each come to him with his or her little specialty, that would play fifteen or thirty minutes, and had, after trying it before him, had it rejected or accepted in its entirety. Then, author and actor in one, they had each made his or her appeal to the public."

"There were no hers on the stage in those days," the editor interposed.

"No matter," the rejected contributor retorted. "There are now, and that is the important matter. I am coming to the very instant of actuality, to the show which I saw yesterday, and which I should have brought my paper down to mention if it had been accepted." He drew a long breath, and said with a dreamy air of retrospect, "It is all of a charming unity, a tradition unbroken from the dawn of civilization. When I go to a variety show, and drop my ticket into the chopping-box at the door, and fastidiously choose my unreserved seat in the best place I can get, away from interposing posts and persons, and settle down to a long afternoon's delight, I like to fancy myself a far-fetched phantom of the past, who used to do the same thing at Thebes or Nineveh as many thousand years ago as you please. I like to think that I too am an unbroken tradition, and my pleasure will be such as shaped smiles immemorially gone to dust."

The editor made his reflection that this passage was probably out of the rejected

contribution, but he did not say anything, and his visitor went on.

"And what a lot of pleasure I did get, yesterday, for my fifty cents! There were twelve stunts on the bill, not counting the kalatechnoscope, and I got in before the first was over, so that I had the immediate advantage of seeing a gifted fellow-creature lightly swinging himself between two chairs which had their outer legs balanced on the tops of caraffes full of water, and making no more of the feat than if it were a walk in the Park, or down Fifth Avenue. How I respected that man! What study had gone to the perfection of that act, and the others that he equally made nothing of! He was simply billed as 'Equilibrist,' when his name ought to have been blazoned in letters a foot high if they were in any wise to match his merit. He was followed by 'Twin Sisters,' who, as 'Refined Singers and Dancers,' appeared in sweeping confections of white silk, with deeply drooping, widely spreading white hats, and long-fringed white parasols heaped with artificial roses, and sang a little tropical romance, whose burden was

Under the bambou-trée,

brought in at unexpected intervals. They also danced this romance, with languid undulations, and before you could tell how or why, they had disappeared and reappeared in short green skirts, and then shorter white skirts, with steps and stops appropriate to their costumes, but always, I am bound to say, of the refinement promised. I can't tell you in what their refinement consisted, but I am sure it was there, just as I am sure of the humor of the two brothers who next appeared as 'Singing and Dancing Comedians' of the coon type. I know that they sang and they danced, and worked sable pleasantries upon each other with the help of the pianist, who often helps out the dialogue of the stage in vaudeville. They were not so good as the next people, a jealous husband and a pretty wife, who seized every occasion in the slight drama of 'The Singing Lesson,' and turned it to account in giving their favorite airs. I like to have a husband disguise himself as a German maestro, and musically make out why his wife is so zealous in studying with him,

and I do not mind in the least having the sketch close without reason: it leaves something to my imagination. Two of 'America's Leading Banjoists' charmed me next, for after all there is nothing like the banjo. If one does not one's self rejoice in its plunking, there are others who do, and that is enough for my altruistic spirit. Besides, it is America's leading instrument, and those who excel upon it appeal to the patriotism which is never really dormant in us. Its close association with color in our civilization seemed to render it the fitting prelude of the next act, which consisted of 'Monologue and Songs' by a divine creature in lampblack, a shirt-waist worn outside his trousers, and an exaggerated development of stomach. What did he say, what did he sing? I don't know; I only know that it rested the soul and brain, that it soothed the conscience, and appeased the hungerings of ambition. Just to sit there and listen to that unalloyed nonsense was better than to 'sport with Amaryllis in the shade, or with the tangles of Næara's hair,' or to be the object of a votive dinner, or to be forgiven one's sins; there is no such complete purgation of care as one gets from the real Afro-American when he is unreal, and lures one completely away from life, while professing to give his impressions of it. You, with your brute preferences for literality, will not understand this, and I suppose you would say I ought to have got a purer and higher joy out of the little passage of drama, which followed, and I don't know but I did. It was nothing but the notion of a hapless, half-grown girl, who has run away from the poorhouse for a half-holiday, and brings up in the dooryard of an old farmer of the codger type, who knew her father and mother. She at once sings, one doesn't know why, 'Oh, dear, what can the matter be,' and she takes out of her poor little carpet-bag a rag-doll, and puts it to sleep, with 'By low, baby,' and the old codger puts the other dolls to sleep, nodding his head, and kicking his foot out in time, and he ends by offering that poor thing a home with him. If he had not done it, I do not know how I could have borne it, for my heart was in my throat with pity, and the tears were in my eyes. Good heavens! What

simple instruments we men are! The falsest note in all Hamlet is in those words of his to Guildenstern: 'You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. . . . 'S blood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?' Guildenstern ought to have said: 'Much, my lord! Here is an actor who has been summering in the country, and has caught a glimpse of pathetic fact commoner than the dust in the road, and has built it up in a bit of drama as artless as a child would fancy, and yet it swells your heart and makes you cry. Your mystery? You have *no* mystery to an honest man. It is only fakes and frauds who do not understand the soul. The simplest willow whistle is an instrument more complex than man.' That is what I should have said in Guildenstern's place if I had had Hamlet with me there at the vaudeville show.

"In the pretty language of the play-bill," the contributor went on, "this piece was called 'A Pastoral Playlet,' and I should have been willing to see 'Mandy Hawkins' over again, instead of the 'Seals and Sea Lions,' next placarded at the sides of the curtain immediately lifted on them. Perhaps I have seen too much of seals, but I find the range of their accomplishments limited, and their impatience for fish and lump sugar too frankly greedy before and after each act. Their banjo-playing is of a most casual and irrelevant sort; they ring bells, to be sure; in extreme cases they fire small cannon; and their feat of balancing large and little balls on their noses is beyond praise. But it may be that the difficulties overcome are too obvious in their instances; I find myself holding my breath, and helping them along too strenuously for my comfort. I am always glad when the curtain goes down on them; their mere flumping about the stage makes me unhappy; but they are not so bad, after all, as trained dogs. They were followed by three 'Artistic European Acrobats,' who compensated and consoled me for the seals, by the exquisite ease with which they wrought the impossibilities of their art, in the famil-

iar sack-coats and top-coats of every-day. I really prefer tights and spangles, but I will not refuse impossibilities simply because they are performed, as our diplomats are instructed to appear at European courts, in the ordinary dress of a gentleman; it may even add a poignancy to the pleasure I own so reluctantly.

"There came another pair of 'Singers and Dancers,' and then a 'Trick Cyclist,' but really I cannot stand trick cycling, now that plain cycling, glory be! has so nearly gone out. As soon as the cyclist began to make his wheel rear up on its hind leg and carry him round the stage in that posture, I went away. But I had had enough without counting him, though I left the kalatechnoscope, with its shivering and shimmering unseen. I had had my fill of pleasure, rich and pure, such as I could have got at no legitimate theatre in town, and I came away opulently content."

II

The editor reflected awhile before he remarked: "Then I don't see what you have to complain of or to write of. Where does the decline of the vaudeville come in?"

"Oh," the rejected contributor said, with a laugh, "I forgot that. It's still so good, when compared with the mechanical drama of the legitimate theatre, that I don't know whether I can make out a case against it now. But I think I can, both in quality and quantity, though the decline is most observable in the quantity. There are now only three playhouses in New York where the variety show still flourishes, against six where it flourished a few years ago. Then I always had a place where I could pass an intellectual afternoon with an unfailing change of bill, but now! I think the change began insidiously to steal upon the variety show with the increasing predominance of short plays. Since they were short, I should not have minded them so much, but they were always so bad! Still, I could go out, when they came on, and return for the tramp magician, or the comic musician, who played upon joints of stovepipe and the legs of reception-chairs and the like, and scratched matches on his two days' beard, and smoked a plaintive air on a cigarette. But when the

'playlets' began following each other in unbroken succession, I did not know what to do. Almost before I was aware of their purpose three of the leading vaudeville houses threw off the mask, and gave plays that took up the whole afternoon; and though they professed to intersperse the acts with what they called 'big vaudeville,' I could not be deceived, and I simply stopped going. When I want to see a four-act play, I will go to the legitimate theatre, and see something that I can smell, too. The influence of the vaudeville has on the whole been so elevating and refining that its audiences cannot stand either the impurity or the imbecility of the fashionable drama. But now the vaudeville itself is beginning to decline in quality as well as quantity."

"Not towards immodesty?"

"No, not so much that. But the fine intellectual superiority of the continuous performance is beginning to suffer contamination from the plays where there are waits between the acts. I spoke just now of the tramp magician, but I see him no longer at the variety houses. The comic musician is of the rarest occurrence; during the whole season I have as yet heard no cornet solo on a revolver or a rolling-pin. The most dangerous acts of the trapeze have been withdrawn. The acrobats still abound, but it is three long years since I looked upon a coon act with real Afro-Americans in it, or saw a citizen of Cincinnati in a fur overcoat keeping a silk hat, an open umbrella and a small wad of paper in the air with one hand. No, the vaudeville is dying. It is true that the conquest of its houses by the full-fledged drama has revived the old-fashioned stock companies in many cases, and has so far worked for good, but it is a doubtful advantage when compared with the loss of the direct inspiration of the artists who created and performed their stunts."

"Delightful word!" the editor dreamily noted. "How did it originate?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's probably a perversion of stint, a task or part, which is also to be found in the dictionary as stent. What does it matter? There is the word, and there is the thing, and both are charming. I approve of the stunt because it is always the stuntist's own. He imagined it, he made it, and he loves

it. He seems never to be tired of it, even when it is bad, and when nobody in the house lends him a hand with it. Of course, when it comes to that, it has to go, and he with it. It has to go when it is good, after it has had its day, though I don't see why it should go; for my part there are stunts I could see endlessly over again, and not weary of them. Can you say as much of any play?"

"Gilbert and Sullivan's operas," the editor suggested.

"That is true. But without the music? And even with the music, the public won't have them any longer. I would like to see the stunt fully developed. I should like to have that lovely wilding growth delicately nurtured into drama as limitless and lawless as life itself, owing no allegiance to plot, submitting to no rule or canon, but going gayly on to nothingness as human existence does, full of gleaming lights, and dark with inconsequent glooms, musical, merry, melancholy, mad, but never-ending as the race itself."

"You would like a good deal more than you are ever likely to get," the editor said; and here he thought it was time to bring his visitor to book again. "But about the decline of vaudeville?"

"Well, it isn't grovelling yet in the mire with popular fiction, but it is standing still, and whatever is standing still is going backward, or at least other things are passing it. To hold its own, the vaudeville must grab something more than its own. It must venture into regions yet unexplored. It must seize not only the fleeting moments, but the enduring moments of experience; it should be wise not only to the whims and moods, but the passions, the feelings, the natures of men; for it appeals to a public not sophisticated by mistaken ideals of art, but instantly responsive to representations of life. Nothing is lost upon the vaudeville audience, not the lightest touch, not the airiest shadow of meaning. Compared with the ordinary audience at the legitimate theatres—"

"Then what you wish," the editor suggested, "is to elevate the vaudeville."

The visitor got himself out of the Easy Chair, with something between a groan and a growl. "You mean, to kill it."

Editor's Study.

It has been our expectation that Miss Mary Johnston's new novel, "Sir Mortimer," would begin in the May number of this Magazine. For ourselves and for our readers we are sorry that this plan cannot be realized. Two-thirds of the manuscript has been in our hands for several months, and Mr. Yohn has made good progress with his illustrations; but the author's illness—due to a physical weakness, in despite of which she has accomplished all her wonderful work in fiction—has interrupted her labors. Only temporarily, we hope, for her own sake and for the sake of American literature. We have seen enough of "Sir Mortimer" to be assured of its extraordinary literary merit and dramatic power. More than in any of her other novels the romance is subjective, psychological. The temporary loss of the story will be made good to our readers by the substitution for it, as soon as possible, of a serial novel of such distinction as to be worthy of its place in the line of noble succession, which includes the names of Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy—indeed of nearly every master of English fiction, since the establishment of the Magazine.

I

ANY writer for this Magazine would make a grave mistake should he suppose that we wish to exclude the serious article from its pages, or that we wish to confine the field for this kind of article to science, art, and literature. A careful consideration of the contents of the Magazine for the past year would quite dispel that illusion if it is anywhere entertained. The space which we have given to Professor Ely's articles on typical social experiments—to say nothing of the portrayal of characteristic traits of American life in papers like that of Booth Tarkington on "The Middle West"—shows our favorable disposition toward really valuable contributions of that kind.

There is nothing that we more especially desire than the vitally serious interpretation of life, whether the theme be contemporaneous or retrospective; for, however far away, it is human life that is disclosed, and only needs to be brought near to command general human interest. And in all such disclosures we crave the studies of the profound philosopher. Are we emphatic enough concerning this when we say that to us nothing seems more important than philosophy, if it be not abstruse, but illuminating, interpretative?

The interest awakened by such novel disclosures of nature as were made by Professor Thomson's articles on the cathode and Becquerel rays, great as it is, is not to be compared with that which at once enthalls and liberates us in

some new interpretation of our human life, past or present, or some truly philosophic speculation as to what that life is to become on this planet. Nothing appealing to such an interest is excluded from this Magazine. We establish a test of exclusiveness only in our demand that all attempts in this direction shall be vitally serious—that there shall be something beyond the merely obvious in the essay, something more than the merely superficial in the article of travel or the sketch of social life, urban or rural, something more than the mere record in a historical paper.

If, therefore, the eager reader ever misses articles of this high order,—that is, if he would have more of them than he finds in these pages,—it is only because writers do not or cannot meet our requirements. We can only hope that our hunger and thirst for the better thing may stimulate writers to efforts for its production and to deeper observation and insight, so that they may see not merely the static condition, but the dynamic movement, its trend and tendency, whether it be freshly emergent and interesting as a novel development with forward-looking meaning, or something old enough to be established as a trait reflecting historic significance.

When the reader considers the large proportion of space given to stories in the Magazine, let him remember that it is in the best fiction that the deeper currents of our modern life and thought are most interpretatively indicated. A great story, therefore, goes far toward