

Wonderful Scenes.

We see (writes a critic of the production) the Council Chamber, with Wolsey dominating the King, and Queen Katharine already the Cardinal's enemy. We go to Wolsey's palace, where the heedless revels and the merris dances are heralded by the grace sung by the choir in the gallery (for Wolsey was always fundamentally the churchman), and where Henry meets Anne Bullen.

We pass to the sombre River Gate (a scene this of particular beauty), whence Buckingham, with splendid dignity, goes to his death, and to the terrace at Windsor, where above the meadows of the Thames Anne first dreams of sovereignty and Katharine learns that her dishonour is assured.

The abortive divorce trial is heard in a magnificent representation of the Hall at Blackfriars, the red-coated Cardinal sitting as judge on the right, the King, the plaintiff, on his throne opposite, and Katharine fighting with peerless courage, backed by the crowd of clerics and the common people, every man and woman keenly sympathising.

Then to the ante-chamber, where, with the singing of the monks in his ears, Wolsey faces his enemies, and is defeated with all the dignity of the greater, who, so often in this queer world, is the victim of the less, and finally to Westminster Abbey, where Anne is crowned, a timid, shrinking figure, with her husband, huge, fearful, menacing—against his own will—watching the ceremony from behind the curtains of a box.

The splendour and completeness of this last scene was beyond all praise. It was immediately preceded by Katharine's sombre and much too lengthy death scene at Kimbolton Abbey. The death of the Queen coming almost simultaneously with the elevation of the other had a genuine dramatic appeal, and conveyed, inevitably, the feeling that amid all the pomp and glory of her coronation, the axe was hovering over the pretty, thoughtless head of Anne Bullen.

A Slice of Important History.

There are two kinds of history, Balzac tells us, writes W. L. Courtney in the London "Telegraph"—the official, lying kind that is usually taught, and the secret kind, "wherein we must look for the true causes of events—the history of shameful things." The dramatist whose duty it was to furnish in "King Henry VIII." some kind of courtly entertainment, early in the seventeenth century, for the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth, must have found it a hard task to steer his way between these two kinds of history. On the one hand there was the duty imposed upon him of glorifying the Tudor dynasty, together with the still more concrete and tangible fact that he was bound to write up the fame and splendour of the Virgin Queen, who was the daughter of Anne Bullen. And what was there on the other side? Assuredly there were some "shameful things," to which he could not shut his eyes. Henry VIII., to begin with—a figure who looms large in history—appears in his domestic circle a tyrannical, envious, rather common, and decidedly amorous man. The official kind of history makes much of this monarch as the founder of the English Church, the champion of Anglicanism against Papistical designs. And here is Shakespeare telling us that the main motive for his action in getting rid of Katharine of Aragon and defying the Pope was a sudden base desire to possess himself of Anne Bullen. And, because Wolsey could not or would not manage to get ecclesiastical sanction for the annulment of his early marriage, he turns to Cranmer and the Protestants, and shakes off allegiance to Rome. We pass over poor little Anne Bullen herself—"fresh fish," as the sympathetic old lady calls her, a slight, innocent figure, apparently, but also not a little vain, and, when she had the chance, exceedingly luxurious in her habits. But she was the mother of Queen Elizabeth, and therefore the Royal historian has to be careful in his portraiture. Then there is the great figure of Cardinal Wolsey, a statesman, a diplomatist, a man who made the name of England respected on the Continent as it had not been before, a great educational reformer, a man, also, of consummate artistic taste. This is how the official history describes him; and, it must be added, with no little truth. But in the play he acts no very distinguished part. He is a sort of Machiavelli, making use of the weaknesses of those around him in order to secure his own ends; a friend to Henry VIII., because it was to his immediate advantage to keep in with the ruling monarch, but also a man whose policy on every occasion was determined by his own interests

—a politician, as he himself acknowledges at the time of his fall, too much engrossed by ambition. Nothing became him better than the way in which he laid down his dignities. Before he was pursued, keen to amass wealth, a subtle schemer, a dangerous ecclesiastic, a wily diplomatist. When ruin overtakes him he falls back on a certain simplicity and contentment, as though at last he had found himself. And what, finally, are the two sympathetic figures in which the dramatist makes us really interested? They are both victims of King and Cardinal. One is the Duke of Buckingham, in whose mouth he places the most pathetic of farewell speeches; and the other is the sainted figure of Queen Katharine, who is displaced by her rival, Anne Bullen—a figure full of nobility, of tenderness, of strength, a constant and affectionate wife,

Magnificence of the Court.

Many impressions remain on the mind after seeing the grandiose production at His Majesty's Theatre. There is the magnificence of the time, the richness of the pageants, the splendour of the dresses, the elaborate adornments of a cultivated and extravagant age. That is one impression which runs throughout the drama, and is seen, perhaps, at its best in the very remarkable picture of the banqueting hall in Wolsey's Palace. Here Mr. Percy Macquoid, who has been responsible for the scene, has worked with a loving hand. The hall in the late Tudor Gothic style, with its fan-roofed ceiling; the stone walls, of which the lower portions are hung with woven fabrics of velvet and gold; the black velvet chairs trimmed with green fringe and embroidered with the Cardinal's hat—all these set off by the flashing radiance of colour introduced by the revelers, who come in to grace the banquet, form a colour-scheme of rose, red, and green, with the Cardinal himself, representing the apex; as it were, or centre, as a point of vivid scarlet. This is assuredly one of the most brilliant stage pictures ever presented to a modern audience. Next come the Holbein pictures. Thanks to Holbein, we have a very close acquaintance with the personal appearance of Bluff King Hal and those members of his court who intrigued around him. Holbein, too, does not seem to have cared much for the official aspects of history. At all events, in his portrait of the monarch he is no flatterer. Accurately got up to represent Henry VIII. as depicted by the painter Mr. Arthur Bouvelier stands before us, with fair skin, and golden hair, and stabby beard, with a broad, good-natured face, devoid of refinement, a cruel, straight mouth, and small eyes, with most characteristic and animal-like eyebrows. It is a veritable triumph of stage portraiture, but perhaps it gives away too decisively the real character of the man whom Froide described as a hero. There is nothing regally impressive about this Tudor Sovereign. There is much that is coarse and clumsy, with a sort of external bonhomie, disguising a small and mean nature. If this be the view, we are to take of Henry VIII., it is undoubtedly the fault of Holbein and Shakespeare between them. Holbein gave us his external lineaments; Shakespeare has let down the window in front of his skrunken little soul. And we wonder sometimes what the courtiers of the day, a quarter of a century after the death of King Henry, thought of the Royal father of the Virgin Queen.

A Pageant, Not a Play.

Meanwhile there is another impression which remains strong upon us. Sir Herbert Tree, with his usual acute perception, has seized the right point of view from which to regard the play. Play it can scarcely be called, because the construction is so loose, and the links of connection between the various scenes are so deficient. But there have been past periods in which "Henry VIII." has proved a popular piece of stage work, because it represents on the boards the main features of the sixteenth century, and its love of magnificent display. Thus "King Henry VIII." is a pageant, or, rather, a series of pageants; and it is in this fashion that it is shown before our eyes at His Majesty's Theatre. Picture after picture is unrolled. In the first act, the best of the three in which Sir Herbert Tree has arranged the drama, we have that magnificent scene in Wolsey's Palace, to which reference has already been made. Then in the second act there

are at least three memorable scenic effects—the River Gata, in which Buckingham goes forth from the Tower to meet his fate, gloomy and solemn as the occasion demands; the pretty Pleasure-boat at Windsor-Castle, where we see Anne Bullen first becoming aware of the great destiny awaiting her; and the Hall in Blackfriars, in which Queen Katharine, pleading for her Royal dignity, determines to make her appeal to Rome. And to these succeed other pictures in the third act, no less splendid and elaborate in detail. The Ante-Chamber, with the adjoining chapel, where Cardinal Wolsey bids farewell to all his greatness; Kimbolton, where Queen Katharine, in the most pathetic scene of the play, fades slowly out of life; and the final display in Westminster Abbey, where Anne attains the summit of her ambition—these are the things on which the eye loves to rest, because they yield a rare pleasure of their own, and form beautiful and statefully memories, on which the mind is glad to dwell.

The Eternal Question—Hall Caine and the Censor.

Hall Caine's latest play, "The Eternal Question," is an astonishingly frank discussion of matters that have been so long taboo on the British stage. The play was fully reviewed in last week's issue, and it will be recalled, turns on, as the London "Daily Telegraph" puts it, "the relative sin of the man and of the woman in the offence which entitles the injured party to separation or divorce." The astonishing thing is that when dramatists of much more conspicuous ability and apparently more lofty intention, take social questions of this sort for a theme in a powerful play designed directly to point a moral, the Censor has fallen on their work with sixteen stone of self-righteousness and contumacious humbug. Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker and Arnold Bennett are all leading dramatists who have had to suffer in this direction. On the other hand, when Mr. Hall Caine comes along with a drama charged up to the hilt with so-called salacious material, a good deal of which might be censored with advantage, he is received with open arms. The critics of the big dailies who manufacture sanctimonious objections against dramatic writers of the modern school give themselves up to columns of serious discussion on the merits of the play, and otherwise give it the most astonishing publicity. It seems that Mr. Hall Caine has succeeded where others have failed, because what he lacks in cold reason he has made up in mawkish sentiment deeply tinged with sexual colouring. You can always play upon people's emotions, physical or spiritual, and excite them to such a stage that many people mistake them for intellectual convictions when an appeal to reason will fail. This every far-seeing politician, priest and playwright well knows. Mr. Hall Caine does it for all he is worth, which ought to be a tidy sum nowadays. Sentimental treatment of sex questions always pay handsomely where the application of reason in any discussion or writing fails disastrous. The author of "The Eternal Question" gets to grips every time with the maudlin side of human nature, and since the majority of Englishmen cannot help feeling that way, his triumph is assured. It is only in England that the particular hypocrisy can prevail which shakes with blubbery sobs over Hall Caine and is grievously shocked by the truth flashes of Shaw's genius. And as history shows, it only lasts until the rising tide of education and intellectual insight comes to the flood and swamps it.

A Promising Comedy for New Zealand.

On the return of Mr. Geo. Willoughby and his English Farceful Comedy Co. to Auckland on December 5 next, playgoers are to be indulged in what is described as "an intellectual farce"—that is, a farce literary enough and clever enough to warrant an intelligent hearing. The piece referred to is "Mr. Preedy and the Countess," in which R. C. Carton, the author, is said to have done really excellent and entertaining work. Mr. Carton, it will be recalled, is author of "Mr. Hopkinson," which Hugh Ward did so well in New Zealand last year. It is somewhat rare for a play like "Mr. Preedy and the Countess" to appeal both to mere amusement-seekers and to those who demand a little skill and artistry in what is offered for their diversion. But it can be safely recommended to all playgoers who want something more than froth. The play made a good impression in

Melbourne a month or two ago. It is shortly to be staged by Mr. Willoughby at the Criterion, Sydney, where he and his Company are making playgoers laugh with "The Night of the Party." The forthcoming Auckland season will be for 12 nights, and "Preedy" will be the principal attraction. From the Northern City Company, after playing the Waikato and Waikoi districts, goes South.

Municipal Music in Wellington.

The first concert of Wellington's newly-organised Municipal Orchestra was to be held in the Town Hall in that city this (Wednesday) evening, under the conductorship of Mr. J. Maughan Barnett. A highly attractive programme was arranged as a beginning. There were to be selections from Massenet's "Le Cid," ballet music, two movements of Haydn's Symphony, the prelude to the third act of Wagner's "Lohengrin," and the Corneilus March which Mr. Barnett has frequently played at his organ recitals. Mr. Herbert Bloy, the leader of the orchestra, was also to play a solo or two. It will be a good start in the good cause of municipal music for the people.

Gisborne Shakespeare Club.

A lady correspondent writes as follows:—
The Gisborne Shakespeare Club gave its first public reading at the Trinity Schoolroom on Thursday last, and scored a well-merited success. The seating capacity of the hall was taxed to its limit before the reading started, and late-comers had to be content with "standing room only." Mr. Frank Kennedy, the popular president, introduced the club to the public in a happy little speech, emphasising its artistic and educational value, and expressed the hope that their inaugural reading of "As You Like It" would find the club a place in the hearts of the critical and cultured audience assembled. From the opening lines the readers seemed to grip the attention of the listeners, and although the play had necessarily been pruned severely, the scenes had been so well sorted out and woven together that the movements of the players and the development of the story were well maintained and easily followed with the assistance of Mr. Andrew's announcements as chorus. The quips of Touchstone, the melancholy musings of Jacques, the charming scenes between Orlando and Rosalind, and other

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