

University he plunged into a fighting corps, wore the colours proudly, and narrowly escaped some serious duels. The manner in which Wagner describes what was a tragic episode of his student days, the unsparring way in which he confesses his faults, throws new light upon his character. In simple but exceedingly moving words he tells of the gambling passion that held him like a demon; his long run of ill-luck maddened him; he lost interest in all else but play. Indifferent to the opinion of his former companions, he vanished from their midst, passing night after night with only the lowest of students in the small gambling houses of Leipzig. With dull apathy he bore the contempt of his sister Rosalie, who, like his mother, rarely caught a glimpse of him.

Finally, having lost everything, he used some money he held in trust for his mother, and that, too, was swallowed up with the exception of one thaler. Sick in mind and body—he had eaten nothing for hours—he sat through that terrible night distracted. He knew that the thaler represented his whole life and existence, for, that lost, he could never return home, and he saw himself wandering aimlessly in the grey of the morning through the fields and woods—a prodigal son. Suddenly, while on the verge of despair, he won and won again. Mechanically he staked again, and still he won, until there was sufficient to repay all his debt. The warmth that filled his soul and body was, he says, of a sacred nature; he felt that he was not abandoned by God and His angels; he felt a holy presence whispering warning and consolation. He was cured. He went home and slept soundly for hours, and awoke new born.

Deterred by no sense of shame, he told his mother of his experience in that momentous night, and returned her money, under acknowledgment of his sin. She folded her hands and thanked God for the grace He had shown her son, and expressed her firm conviction that he was saved, and that temptation would never again assail him. This was actually the case, and Wagner then threw himself with renewed ardour into his musical studies, entering upon a new and serious phase.

The publication of the autobiography is the greatest event of the year in musical literature, and likely to exert considerable influence on the varied opinions that exist as to his marvellous qualities of philosopher, poet, mechanic, librettist, and musician.

Santley's Farewell.

Before some tens of thousands of listeners, Sir Charles Santley, his score trembling vibrantly in his hands, sang at the Crystal Palace for the last time in London recently. Despite the gaiety of the scene there was no little melancholy in this farewell of the greatest singer England has ever produced.

Sir Charles looked touchingly bent and frail, according to all accounts, but his voice rang out across the vast spaces—the Crystal Palace is a Sahara among concert halls—with surprising resonance. He sang Gounod's "There is a green hill far away" and "Honour and Arms" of Handel with such polished style as to prove that it would still be a true pleasure, quite apart from the sentiment of the thing, to hear his relic of a glorious voice—Sir Charles is aged seventy-seven—in a less inordinately huge hall. Patti, Albani, and Santley have been making farewell appearances for years, so that there may be "absolutely the last appearance" to come yet. The British public is used to this sort of thing, pays up hand-somely, and continues to marvel at the vitality and power of its favourites, who have grown old and grey in the service of song.

Moody-Manners Farewell.

Yet another farewell is that of Mr. Charles Manners and Madam Fanny Moody, known to the musical world as the leaders of the Moody-Manners Opera Company, who have both retired from the stage for good. Reviewing his 32 years of opera singing to an interviewer, Mr. Manners, said recently:—"Financially I have been successful. From the artistic point of view I am the most disappointed and disillusioned of men. After all the labour and enthusiasm I have expended over my day-dream—the establishment of a National Opera House in London on a permanent basis—it seems not a bit nearer realisation. Not that I am going to give up! The money that has been lost over opera in London, the schemes that have failed—nothing of that discourages me.

I know my scheme is workable, and I am not going to leave off talking about it. If it were adopted, a National Opera House could be brought into existence and could be made to pay without a halfpenny of State aid.

200 Tons of Scenery.

"I am not disbanding my opera company. It is touring now in the north of England, and is making money as usual. There, is the organisation, with 200 tons of scenery, 80 tons of costumes, and band parts of 25 operas; the National Opera can have all that for nothing the moment it comes into existence.

"There are hundreds of fresh and beautiful voices waiting in Britain for a chance of recognition. There is more talent there than anywhere else in the world! It is all wasted! There are three touring operatic companies in England to-day. In Italy there are more than three hundred."

"Have you any sentimental regrets at leaving the theatre?" he was asked.

"Regrets? I am thankful to say goodbye to it," Mr. Manners exclaimed warmly. "I am a disappointed man!"

The Dramatic Critic.

So many complaints come from the public both at home and in our own land that dramatic criticism is a force, that the matter seems to deserve some attention. A writer in "M.A.P." says that of late years criticism has been worth little or nothing. He says that the advertisement column, and the bond of good fellowship control Press notices. He then goes on to say: "In London, most theatrical notices can be written before the production, leaving only the plot of the play and its reception to be added on afterwards. In most cases critics can afford to be honest about the play itself; but when it comes to the players, they cannot and do not really speak their minds. Nearly every popular actor is his own manager, which means that he is the man who pays for the daily, weekly, and monthly advertisements.

A rush of flattering Press notices tempts the manager to give the play a good boom in the display columns of newspapers.

Yet even with the play itself the public has long since ignored dramatic criticism. On the night of its production Rudolf Besler's delectable comedy, "Don," was condemned; but it became a success. The same is true of "Raffles" and "Arsène Lupin." On the other hand, several plays are received fulsomely, and do not run three weeks.

One reason why critics do not deal plainly with managers is the bond of personal friendship. Actors are now recognised in Society, and paragraphed by the Press. They meet big critics wherever they go. The manager is a useful friend for the critic to know, and vice versa. The critics enjoy supper-parties, dinners, and free seats. There is also the softening influence of exhilarating champagne.

Critics do, indeed, give fair notices to the players of smaller parts, and often they pick out a clever performance by an unknown actor. All that part of their business is fair and square, because it is not affected by personal friendship or other considerations.

The difficulty with the actor-manager is that he must be mentioned in the Press notice. Not only is mere silence impossible, but the mention of him must in practice be praise.

I remember a case, now many years ago, where a London manager produced a play which became a huge success; but on the first night it was regarded as somewhat ragged. The critic of a certain newspaper happened to be also the composer of the score, and his junior attended the premiere. What the junior wrote caused trouble, and a fortnight later a second notice, of a very different character, appeared in the Press. It was written and signed by the composer, who happened also to be the critic. In the provinces, Press notices are considered to be the only way of bringing good fortune, but they are so uniformly laudatory that nobody really pays any attention to them.

It would be much better for the profession if there were more freedom.

Cannot something be done to restore the absolute independence of the dramatic critic?

Post Pars.

The remedy for this is to make Press notices absolutely independent of any

By Royal Command.

MAGNIFICENT SCENE AT DRURY LANE.

LONDON'S GREATEST ACTORS PARTICIPATE.

LONDON, May 19.

DRURY LANE THEATRE has been the scene of many memorable theatrical performances by Royal command, but the "Command" performance of Lord Lytton's old-fashioned comedy "Money" last Wednesday evening produced a spectacle of overwhelming magnificence and charm, and unparalleled display of great personages, of theatrical talent, of decorative skill and taste; of costly jewels, delightful dresses and feminine loveliness—a theatre pageant unique in its brilliance and beauty.

The "command" performance was for "one night only," but for that night the whole theatre had been converted

climbing as it were to the ceiling, from which masses of pendant foliage drooped between the writhed electric lamps. The deep rich colours of the tulips and carnations were well set off by the white and gold of seats and galleries rising from a sea of lavender carpeting. Flowerlike too were the occupants of the stalls and balconies and boxes. Tier above tier, row by row, were gathered as it seemed all the most beautiful women in London, in royal blue and heliotrope, and purple and pink and shimmering silver, with the light flashing from tiaras of diamonds, from emeralds, rubies, and sapphires. As for the men in inconspicuous evening dress, they hardly seemed to count, save as a black and white foil to make the tints of the ladies and the



THAT POINT OF VIEW.

"Now, boys—not a word about my matrimonial affairs—that doesn't concern the public in the least."

into a fairyland of the most beautiful flowers. There were flowers in banks and masses on the staircases and in the vestibules, bouquets of flowers on the backs of the seats in the stalls and on the ledges of the boxes, flowers festooned high up on columns and pilasters, and

hues of blossoms and draperies more vivid by contrast.

It was a night of wonder and beauty, at which Royalty, London society, the stage, and the scenic arts were all displayed in their most brilliant aspects.

"It was well worth waiting for," said an elderly lady, who had formed one of the quene which commenced to form outside the theatre at 11 o'clock on Tuesday morning, and had spent over 16 hours waiting to obtain admission to the gallery. There alone could payment at the door secure seats, and 5/ was the toll demanded and eagerly paid for them by people who had waited for 12 to 30 hours.

They had their reward in witnessing the finest social theatrical spectacle of, at any rate, modern times. "Old Drury" was a glittering mass of people, the whole house blazing with diamonds and splendid with gorgeous costumes.

At 8.30 p.m. every seat was occupied save those in the Royal box, which for the occasion was a generous contribution of the Grand Tier. The dress circle of the ordinary theatre. It is said that the 18 chairs in the Royal box were genuine Louis-Seize worth £6000.

It was just a minute to nine when a great crash from the band heralded the coming of the Royal party. At once the audience rose to its feet to welcome the Royal guests.

The King and Kaiser took their places in the centre of the row, with the Queen on the Kaiser's right and the Empress on the King's left; and on either side of these central figures were the Prince of Wales, Princess Victoria Louise, Prince Arthur of Connaught, Princess Maud, the Duke of Argyll, the

consideration of advertising or personal friendship. At first it might mean a small monetary loss, but in the end it would mean a financial gain. People read papers which tell the truth. The public expects, and has a right to expect, that criticism of plays shall be sincere. When readers are misled they take no notice of what a paper says, and consequently the circulation declines. Advertising is not a philanthropic proposition. An advertiser only advertises because it pays him to do so, and in the long run he advertises in the paper most widely read. No paper can really command advertisements unless its reading matter is reliable, and in theatrical matters the public looks for absolutely unbiased opinions. Nor should any artist resent fair criticism if it comes from one who knows. To know a fault is half-way to cure it, and indiscriminate praise is no praise. It is easy to understand the difficult position in which the critic is placed. To praise is easy, and gains both friends and appreciation. But a paper owes a duty to the public as well as to itself, and common sense seems to tell us that "puff para" cannot in the long run serve any useful purpose, because they are appraised at their real value by all parties and so defeat the end they are supposed to serve.