

Commonplace Actors.

Our Illustrations.

Why the Drama is Declining.

By Cecily Hamilton, Author of "Diana of Dobson's."

IT seems to be pretty generally admitted nowadays that the influence of the British drama is declining and falling rather more rapidly than usual; and that the theatre proper—the theatre where you can see "Othello," "Charley's Aunt," and the "Wicked Woman of Wolverhampton"—is being very hard put to it to hold its own against the rival attractions of the knockabout comedian, the intelligent performing seal, and the picture palace with its sixpenny stalls and afternoon tea thrown in. Various reasons are advanced for this lamentable lack of public interest in the playhouse; the most widespread and popular being the specious theory that it is the incompetency of the British dramatist which is at the root of all the trouble—which boldly asserts that theatres are empty because of the badness of the plays performed therein.

Like many widespread and popular theories, this assertion is quite without foundation; more, it is on the face of it ridiculous. I should be the last to maintain that British dramatists are not, in the main, incompetent, and their plays, in the main, bad; what I do maintain is that the public not only does not dislike bad plays, but likes them actively—nay, adores them. If you have any doubts upon that point, you have only to spend a casual evening at any one of the old picture palaces in your immediate neighbourhood, where the chances are that in the course of the entertainment you will have to sit through two or three potted melodramas so infantile in plot and crude in construction that no manager in his senses would dare to present them upon the ordinary stage, the said crude and infantile melodramas being received by a crowded audience with every sign and mark of manifest delight. Clearly, then, the futility of the plays presented is not the reason for the deserted state of the regular theatre—clearly, then, it is not with the much-abused author that the blame should lie. He may be inept; but his very ineptitude is a draw—on the bioscope. Why, then, does it no longer draw in the theatre?

At the risk of appearing disconcerting I feel bound to say that I believe it is because the actor is no longer the attraction that he used to be. By that I do not mean that he is worse professionally—less capable, less talented. Quite apart from his professional qualifications, his formerly unassailable hold upon the interest and affections of the public is not what once it was.

This, of course, is by no means the first time that the fact has been pointed out to him; over and over again he has been warned that he stands not where he did—that, work he the paragraph never so wisely, spread he the photographic postcard never so widely, he does not draw as once he used to do. Indeed, it has been hinted more than once that it is the very use and over use of the channels of advertisement that has caused his decline in public adoration; that the man and woman in the street have become weary of his journalistic confidences, have turned, in sheer satiety, from the perpetual presentment of his steeple or smiling features. He would have done better—so he is informed—to wrap himself in the veil of mystery which is half the attraction of the world beyond the footlights.

So far the advice has not done him any good, and one doubts if it ever will, being in the very nature of things a counsel of perfection and impossible to follow. The actor, like the theatre, lives by publicity; why blame him then

for seeking as much as he can get? Where—so it seems to me—he does err, and err often and profoundly, is in the manner of his self-advertisement, in his ridiculous miscalculation of the taste of a thoroughly respectable public.

To illustrate what I mean. Take up an ordinary theatrical interview, say, with the leading lady of the Asterisk Theatre—who has just leapt to success, and thereby stirred all London to enthusiasm by her performance of a woman with a long and lurid past. She was magnificent, from the pit; she stirred your blood and thrilled you, brought a choke into your throat. . . . and here is her photograph feeding her pet canary. . . . and, again, dispensing nursery tea to her children, Bobby and Janet. She is photographed with her husband, with all the common objects of her house—with all the common objects of everybody's houses. And, if the interviewer has set her down aright, her conversation is as amiably domestic as her counterfeited presentment; there is not a word she utters that does not indicate the model mother, the careful housekeeper, the wife of blameless virtue. In short, she is most thoroughly respectable—even as you and I!

And be it remembered that it is the opposite that attracts you—not the similar. We, as a people, are intensely respectable; and it is just because we are so intensely respectable that the mere suggestion of raffishness and contact with raffishness has for us an irresistible attraction. Why do so many English people spend their hard-earned savings on week-end trips to Paris? Merely because there is about the very name of Paris a suggestion of that impropriety so dear to the soul of the well-conducted Briton—because, even if he has seen nothing more exhilarating than the Morgue and the tomb of Napoleon, he feels that he has somehow had a gay and waggish time. . . . And, exactly in the same way, when the actor and actress were understood to be people you really could not ask to dinner, they exercised an irresistible fascination over those who would have been horrified at the idea of exchanging afternoon calls with them—and took seats in the pit instead.

I do not suppose, for an instant that the theatrical profession, as a whole, was ever less respectable in its manner of living than any other and corresponding classes of the community; but until recent years it was clever enough to pretend that it was. And as long as it kept up the pretence, the actor, just because he was an actor, was an attraction, a power in the land; tales of drink and divorce courts were whispered about him, and those who heard and those who told the tales alike decided they must have a look at him. Then, in a real moment came the craving for respectability; the insistence on the fact that the actor in his private life, the actress in her private life, were even as other men and women are—blameless and orderly and dull. And as a result of that craving and insistence the public has apologised; has admitted that the actor may be a thoroughly respectable person . . . and, having made that admission and apology, has ceased to find him interesting.

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THE LATE CARDINAL MORAN.

A MAN of striking and commanding personality, Cardinal Moran has for over a quarter of a century exercised a great influence upon Roman Catholicism in Australia. Patrick Francis Moran was born in Leighlinbridge, County Carlow, Ireland, on September 16, 1830, and was the son of Patrick Moran and Alicia Cullen, sister of Cardinal Cullen. His eighty years of life have been crowded with action. He was educated at the Irish College of St. Agatha in Rome from 1842 to 1866, and was ordained by special dispensation as to age on March 19, 1853. He was successively student, professor and vice-rector of his college, and later became Professor of Hebrew at the College of the Propaganda. In 1866 he returned to Ireland as private secretary to his uncle, Cardinal Cullen, who became Archbishop of Dublin in 1859, and first Irish Cardinal six years later. In 1872 Cardinal Moran became Professor of History and Scripture at Cunliffe College, and was ordained Bishop of Ossory in the same year, holding that office until 1874. In that year he was translated to the vacant Archdiocese of Sydney, and next year he was called to Rome by Pope Leo XIII. to be made Cardinal, the first to receive the red hat for Australia. He returned to Sydney in 1885, and visited Rome again in 1883, 1893, 1898, 1902, and 1903. He presided at the first Plenary Council of the Roman Catholic Church in Australasia in 1885, and at successive councils at intervals of ten years.

The late Cardinal Moran was honorary chief chaplain of the New Zealand district of Hibernians, the head-quarters of which are in Auckland. The secretary, Mr. W. Kane, last week cabled to Monsignor O'Haran, the late Cardinal's private secretary, a message of condolence at the death of the chief chaplain, and eminent ecclesiastic.

Cardinal Moran was a candidate for the Australian National Convention elected to draft the Commonwealth constitution in 1897, and polled 43,132 votes, which were insufficient to give him a seat in the Convention. He accomplished great work in the religious, social, and political life of Australasia

for more than a quarter of a century. He deliberately chose for himself all those spheres of action. In claiming to be an "Australian among Australians," he once said: "Outside the pale of religion I know of no subject relating to our social and our national welfare in which it is not within my power to work with the same energy and the same devotion of heart and feeling as any other man in Australia." It is claimed that "he lifted the cause of Federation to a higher plane, he took a conspicuous part in the State commemorations of 1888, and in the celebrations connected with the establishment of the Australian Commonwealth, and made noble and highly appreciated efforts as peacemaker during the great maritime strike." While in Rome he made an exhaustive study of the archives of the early Irish and British Churches, from which, and other studies, over twenty learned volumes have proceeded. He was one of the world's authorities on antiquarian research. His works include: "Essays on the Origin of the Irish Church," "History of the Catholic Archbishops of Dublin," "Historical Sketch of the Persecutions under Cromwell and the Puritans," and "Irish Saints in Great Britain," while his work on "The History of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia" is a monumental compilation.

Perhaps his greatest work in Australia was St. Patrick's Ecclesiastical College, which he founded and endowed very largely from his own private funds. Over £100,000 was spent on this institution, of which the bulk came from its founder's own purse. He founded no less than 27 other institutions connected with the Roman Catholic Church, and his influence was such that appeals he made for their establishment and support were very liberally responded to. He recently raised £50,000 of the £100,000 required to complete St. Mary's Cathedral, on which a sum of £100,000 had already been spent during his control of the archdiocese. Fearless of criticism, and a very warm advocate of the interests of his community, Cardinal Moran frequently raised storms of controversy in Sydney, and he was never happier than when championing the cause of Catholicism, and his literary abilities, combined with his great scholarship, made him a very formidable antagonist. He hit straight from the shoulder, and had all the Irishman's love of a good, keen fight, but his fiercest arguments were tinged with dignity, kindness, and the saving grace of humour, so that he never left a wound which rankled. His leadership will be greatly missed by his Church.

Dr. Kelly, Coadjutor Archbishop, is sixty-two years of age, and was consecrated in 1901 in the Church of St. Joachim, Rome, as Archbishop of Acrida, and coadjutor in the right of succession to Cardinal Moran.

THE A. AND P. CONFERENCE.

A picture appears in our illustration pages showing the delegates who attended the recent A. and P. Association's Conference in Wellington. The personnel of the group is as follows:—

Front row, from left to right:—R. D. McLean (Hawke's Bay), E. Campbell (Wanganui), Hon. T. McKenzie (Minister for Agriculture), His Excellency the Governor, D. D. McFarlane (Retiring President), A. S. Orbel (Otago), President, J. G. Wilson (Bulls), O. B. Pemberton (Canterbury), Prof. R. E. Alexander (Lincoln College). Second row:—N. Win (Nelson), J. Cross (Oxford), F. Moore (Wanganui), A. Conway (Manawatu), J. Cunningham (Ellersmere), J. Stringfellow (Ashburton), A. Hawke (Egmont), H. Okey, M.P. (Gisborne), E. W. Reid (Canterbury), H. Overton (Southland), D. Marshall (Southland), Prof. Hilgendorf (Lincoln College), W. C. Buchanan M.P. (Wairarapa). Third row:—B. Seth-Smith (N. Otago), D. McGregor, jun. (Masterland), W. Weld (Oxford), R. H. Russell (Hawke's Bay), S. R. Lancaster (Manawatu), K. D. O'Rourke (Auckland). Fourth row:—H. V. Foltan (Otago), F. S. Pope (Secretary of Agriculture), K. M. Bruce (Kaikoura), J. L. Bruce (Ellersmere), J. Lockhead (Ellersmere), Duncan E. Hall (Secretary), D. Caddy (Director of Dairy Division), J. Ritchie (Timaru), M. Elworthy (Timaru).

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