

### THE CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS.

English literary men are going strongly for the abolition of the office of Censor. This letter was addressed to the press concerning the matter. Just read the signatures:—

"The Prime Minister has consented to receive during next month a deputation from the following dramatic authors on the subject of the censorship of plays. In the meantime they desire to enter a formal protest against this office, which was instituted for political, and not for the so-called moral ends to which it is perverted; an office autocratic in procedure, opposed to the spirit of the Constitution, contrary to common justice, and to common sense. They protest against the power lodged in the hands of a single official—who judges without a public hearing, and against whose dictum there is no appeal—to cast a slur on the good name and destroy the means of livelihood of any member of an honourable calling. They assert that the censorship has not been exercised in the interests of morality, but has tended to lower the dramatic tone by appearing to relieve the public of the duty of moral judgment. They ask to be freed from the menace hanging over every dramatist, of having his work and the proceeds of his work destroyed at a pen's stroke by the arbitrary action of a single official neither responsible to Parliament nor amendable to law. They ask that their art be placed on the same footing as every other art. They ask that they themselves be placed in the position enjoyed under the law by every other

citizen. To these ends they claim that the licensing of plays shall be abolished. The public is already sufficiently assured against managerial misconduct by the present yearly licensing of theatres, which remains untouched by the measure of justice here demanded.—George Bancroft, H. Granville Barker, J. M. Barrie, Florence Bell, Laurence Binyon, Gilbert Cannon, Comyns Carr, R. C. Carton, Egerton Castle, Haddon Chambers, Joseph Conrad, W. L. Courtney, John Davidson, Hubert H. Davies, H. V. Esmond, Frederick Fenn, John Alsworthy, Edward Garnett, W. S. Gilbert, Cosmo Gordon-Lennox, St. John Hankin, Robert Harcourt, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Hope, Laurence Housman, Maurice Hewlett, Henry Hamilton, Basil Hood, Frederick Harrison, E. W. Hornung, Roy Horniman, W. H. Hudson, Ford Maddox Hueffer, Laurence Irving, Henry James, Henry Arthur Jones, W. W. Jacobs, W. J. Locke, John Masefield, Robert Marshall, A. E. W. Mason, W. S. Maugham, Maarten Maartens, Desmond MacCarthy, Justin Huntly McCarthy, T. Sturge Moore, Arthur Morrison, George Meredith, Gilbert Murray, John Pollock, A. W. Pinero, H. M. Haull, (Mrs) De la Pasture, Gilbert Parker, D. March Phillipps, Cecil Raleigh, Elizabeth Robins, Morley Roberts, Ernest Rhys, G. Bernard Shaw, A. Sutro, A. C. Swinburne, Arthur Symonds, J. M. Synge, Edward Thomas, H. A. Vachell, H. G. Wells, Margaret Woods, Anthony Wharton, W. B. Yeats, I Zangwill.

### HARRY RICKARD'S NEW TURNS.

Mr. Harry Rickards has been holding forth to a "Melbourne Sporting News" scribe as follows:—

"Now, what am I going to tell you—that I paid the steamship companies about £8000 in fares this year for passages of artists, and that it will be considerably more in 1908?—Why? Well, because the contracts are all for shorter periods. I find the Australian public wants frequent changes; consequently, where I used to engage people for 12 or 26 weeks, it is now 12 or 14—16 at the very most.

"But it's a difficult task to get artists for any period; they're booked up for years ahead, and only for the kindness of Sir Edward Moss and Mr. Oswald Stoll, of Moss-Stoll fame, the former an old friend of mine for 35 years, of Frank Allen, their head manager, and Frank Glenister, of the London Pavilion, the difficulties would have been still greater. These gentlemen were exceedingly kind in abridging contracts and suspending engagements in order to allow artists to come to Australia.

"One of the best engagements I've made is with Edwin Boyde. This is a performer who commands a salary of £100 a week, and when I tell you he ran for six months, without a break, at the Pavilion, you can understand he is worth getting. He is a singing comedian—and a son of that clever old artist, J. W. Rowley.

"Other artists I have booked, and who will be arriving and showing for a long time ahead, are the Eugenes, gymnasts; Martin Hendeson, a blind musician, the best concertina player I ever heard; the three Cunirds, song and dance artists; the brothers Artois, bar performers; Alma Gray, whom you will no doubt remember well; and the sisters Klos, two beautiful young ladies who do a turn in calisthenics.

"Matters at home are much the same, although the influx of American and Continental artists into England is much smaller. Then, again, managers have made the turns shorter; now only the big stars do more than two songs. I saw Little Tich—he's still the daddy of them all. Is the top liner wherever he appears. I also saw Marie Lloyd before she went to America; she is a thousand per cent. better than when I last heard her. She and Alec Hurley will come to me next year for a short season.

Mr. T. J. West has leased the Olympia building, over Prince's Bridge, Melbourne, from Wirth Bros., and runs moving pictures there on December 21.

A case of interest to managers, principals and chorus alike was recently decided in London by the Court of Appeal, when it set aside the verdict for £300 given by a King's Bench jury for Miss Ethel Newman, against Messrs. Gatti, the proprietors of the Vaudeville Theatre, and entered judgment for the defendants. Miss Newman had been Miss Edna May's understudy in the title role of "The Belle of Mayfair," and when Miss May threw up the part Miss Newman took her place for a fortnight. At the end of that time she informed that Miss Phyllis Dare was to take the principal part. Plaintiff refused to go on as understudy, contending that she had a right to play the principal part during the run of the piece, and brought her action with the result stated above. Lord Justice Vaughan Williams, in giving judgment, said he declined to give to the word "understudy" anything but the accepted meaning attached to it—namely, to play the part in the absence of the principal when called upon to do so by the management. Plaintiff was not entitled to any damages.

The plot of Mr. August Siede's new opera, "Safia," is based on an ancient Venetian law, which aimed at preserving the purity of the Libra d'oro by forbidding intermarriage with any but the nobility and the wealthy merchant class (says "Melbourne Punch"). A marriage, which does not conform with the law, takes place, and is consequently secret. Like all things secret, trouble takes place—jealousy, the theme of the work. The opera offers scope for fine scenic mounting. There are three acts, with a prelude. The work is of a lyric-dramatic nature, the orchestra having a good deal to do in elucidating the working out of the dramatic material. The story is natural, but intensely absorbing, and compels attention. The themes upon which the orchestral structure is built are fitting in a high degree.

What is described as the first real success of the London season was recently produced at the Apollo Theatre, and is by Roy Horniman. "The Education of Elizabeth" is the title of it, and the story tells of a chorus girl, beloved by a wealthy youth, who sends her to a big school for a year. From being a bright, happy girl, the year turns the lady into a drab prude, to the young man's disgust and sorrow. They quarrel, but eventually the girl gets sense again, and all ends happily. Miss Florence Lloyd has made a great success in the title role.

"Miss Hook of Holland," which will be Meynell and Gunn's Easter attraction at Melbourne Royal, has passed its 300th performance at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London, where it shows no signs of waning popularity. It is pronounced to be quite the best musical piece since the popular "Geisha."

Margaret Anglin, who has arranged with J. C. Williamson to visit Australia early next year, with a complete company, will begin rehearsing her repertoire for the Australian season in New York in March, leaving about a month later.

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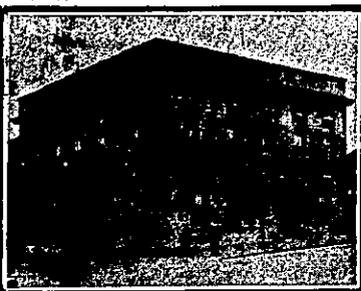
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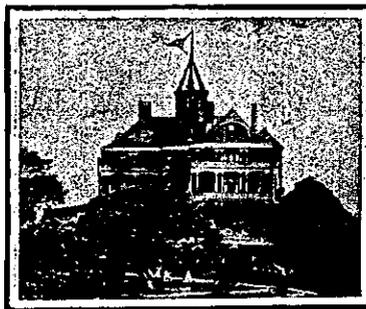
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