

might be supposed to have one way or the other. The meetings of each and every party and political group were reported, apparently, with equal fullness and fairness. We do not mean to say that this newspaper was conducted on the ideal plan, or that it was the only one that tried to act fairly by its readers during the campaign; but its conduct suggests what might be done in this direction, and what we believe will one day be done by every "daily" which calls itself a newspaper and not a mere organ.

#### A Grave Responsibility.

MULTITUDES of good men deplore the result of the recent general election, but those who approve take somewhat the same view of the situation as was here expressed, in January, 1883, with regard to the State elections of the previous autumn. "That the great political reaction of 1882 had no mere partisan significance," we then said, "no one has been more quick to see than the gentleman who has been elected to the Governorship of New York by a vote unprecedented, we believe, in American politics. On the very night of the election, Mr. Cleveland is reported to have said that the revolution meant not so much the turning of public sentiment to the Democratic party as it did dissatisfaction with the Republican party. 'The change,' he added, 'means reform and good government.'"

We went on to say that "if Mr. Cleveland and his party throughout the country live up to this programme of 'reform and good government,' they will have a long hold of power; for the revolution just accomplished . . . had this programme for its main object. . . . The people demand 'reform and good government,' and if they cannot get these from one side, they will get them from another; and if they cannot get them from either of the two great parties which now divide the suffrages of the nation, they will dismiss them both without remorse, as in past epochs, and will create another party to do the work. But whether or no we have a new party, now is the time for new men. Power will not be willingly left in the hands of thrifty renegades to the cause of 'reform and good government.' In other words, the acceptable leaders

of the next ten years will not be men whose conversion to 'civil-service reform' has been by earthquake."

The fact that the "Democratic victory" of 1884 was not *merely* a Democratic victory is too well understood to require discussion here. What happened in the election was exactly what politicians should have known was likely to happen, and what many outside of politics believed would happen. This belief was here definitely expressed as follows in March, 1884, long before either party had nominated a candidate: "We venture, thus early, two predictions: one is, that the independent voter will be found on the side of the candidate whose past life gives the best guarantee that he is in sympathy with the convictions and aims of the independent voter; and the other is, that the candidate supported by the independent voter will be the next President of the United States."

Now the "independent voter," in supporting, whether wisely or unwisely, the candidate of his choice, has contributed to the placing of the executive power in the hands of a party which has hitherto been regarded by Republicans as unlikely to do its duty by the negro. If the responsibility of the "independent voter" is great, how much greater that of the party which directly assumes the reins of government! Will or will not the better and safer counsels of that party prevail in matters of finance, and in all those questions of reform on which good citizens of every political complexion are heartily united? Above all, what will be the attitude of the Democrats of the South with regard to the political rights of the freedmen? But responsibility means also opportunity, and every well-wisher of his country will sincerely hope that not only the new Administration, but its allies of the South, will realize the greatness of the opportunity now offered to them. There are, indeed, many indications that this opportunity will not be neglected, and that the old lines of color, and of geography also, are soon (though none too soon) to fade from sight in American politics.

The paper by Mr. Cable in the present number of THE CENTURY comes with peculiar timeliness at this moment; and Mr. Cable has an especial right to be heard by Southern men in regard to the freedmen, for he is not only a Southerner by birth, but one who took part against the North in the great conflict of arms.

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#### OPEN LETTERS.

##### The Trouble with the Stage.

CRITICS have been bewailing the degradation of the stage for many a long year, and have exhibited great ingenuity in attempting to find a satisfactory explanation of it. Most of them, however, have contrived to overlook the prime source of the evils of which they complain, probably because they have generally dealt with the question as if some complicated social problem were involved, instead of applying to it the principles of common sense and the lessons taught by every-day experience. Theatrical art, like every other art, business, or profession, is exposed, of course, to

many diverse influences, and has its periods of improvement and deterioration, which are not often difficult of explanation, and have been discussed from time immemorial with great frequency, some erudition, and much superfluous rhetoric. All these varying and temporary conditions are entirely outside the modest limits of the present article, which only proposes to deal with the present in a strictly practical way, by pointing out the legitimate deduction from certain notorious facts.

This deduction is simply that the chief cause of the miserable humiliation of the contemporaneous stage must be sought in the ridiculous incompetency of the

vast majority of the men who control the theaters—the managerial autocrats who select plays and companies, and whose wills are omnipotent to decide the casting of a tragedy or the pay of a scrub-woman. In every other walk of life—in theory at least—men cannot dodge their own responsibilities. Is the merchant who cheats his patrons absolved because there are fools enough to make swindling profitable? Do the critics spare the dauber because his smudges find purchasers? Is the author who prostitutes his art to vile and vulgar uses for the sake of gain admitted to the temple of Fame on the score of his pecuniary success? What is the general estimate of the bellowing pulpit charlatan who trades on public ignorance to win notoriety and a fat purse; of legislators who abuse their powers; of editors who betray their trusts? Is there any art, profession, or business in which public credulity, ignorance, or folly is accepted as a valid excuse for non-performance of duty? Why, then, in the name of ordinary intelligence, should an exception be made in favor of the men whose opportunities for good or evil are so vast, whose legal restrictions are so few, and whose prizes are so rich?

Let a man of inquiring mind broach this topic in a conclave of managers, and he will be stunned as by a chorus of parrots. We responsible! We accountable for the depravity of public taste! Angels and ministers of grace, defend us! What new and monstrous form of imbecility is this? Do you not know that we must conduct our theaters, as a tradesman conducts his shop, on plain business principles; that we must furnish the wares which people will pay for or go into bankruptcy? Has it not been proved over and over again that Shakspeare spells ruin, and that all legitimate drama, whether tragedy or comedy, empties theaters and treasuries more surely than the plague? What power have we to compel the populace to forswear theatrical sack and sugar, and seek more wholesome diet? If they demand blood and thunder, we get out our red paint and sheet-iron, and hire a chemist to furnish us with real lightning; if melodrama is the favorite dissipation, we give them all the horrors, mechanical and moral, which can be compressed into five acts; and if comedy is the rage, we can do no less than furnish it, even if we have to reënforce our "artists" with dogs and babies.

On this subject the dullest man of a dull class will wax eloquent, urging the old and stupid plea with so candid an air that it is impossible to doubt his absolute belief in it. And yet no more false or vicious theory was ever advanced. As a matter of fact, the public, primarily, is as little able to prescribe the policy of the stage as it is to ordain what medicines it shall swallow, what customs it will adopt, or what bonnets it will wear. In none of these cases does it exercise forethought or authority. Undoubtedly it has the capacity of choice between the different articles submitted to its consideration, but the quality of the articles themselves depends upon the fertility of the original inventors. The angler who is most cunning in his selection of flies catches the most fish—that is all. This is an axiom which will scarcely be disputed, and to it may be added another, that, as a general rule, persons who have money to spend will go where they can get the best bargains.

Although amid the vast amount of theatrical production during the last decade the mass of rubbish and corruption is overwhelmingly in excess of the material to which any kind of literary or dramatic value can be ascribed, there exists sufficient ground for the assertion that a good play well acted is certain of liberal support. If space permitted, it would be easy enough to specify a dozen plays by way of example; but it is needless to make a catalogue, as the rarity of even tolerable plays keeps their memory green in the minds of all true lovers of the theater. The term "good plays" is not intended to be unreasonably exclusive, but is meant to include all pieces which have a valid excuse for their presentation, such as honesty of purpose, the illustration of some particular phase of social life, artistic construction, analysis of character, or originality of invention, to say nothing of the loftier literary or dramatic qualities which can be exacted only from genius itself, the rarest of human gifts. The classification, unfortunately, may be made broad and liberal without incurring any danger of bewilderment on account of the multitude of precious works to be enumerated. For the present argument the financial success of half a dozen meritorious theatrical representations is all that is necessary, and the most confirmed pessimist will admit readily that this condition has been fulfilled. The objection that good plays have failed occasionally, or even frequently, is nothing to the point unless it can be shown that they were properly performed. The vile treatment of the noblest masterpieces by the modern manager is too notorious to be worthy of an instant's discussion. Ah, ha! cries the manager, with fine scorn, how about the success of the pieces which you, in your infinite wisdom, call "rubbish and corruption"? Why does your innocent public, which has no vote in the board of theatrical trustees, and is obliged to be content with what the arbiters of theatrical fashion prescribe for it—why does it turn its back on intelligent effort, and make my fortune and the speculator's when I treat it to babies and dogs? Do I supply better actors for my puppy drama than I do for my tragedy? Do I expend more money for scenery or show better taste in it? Are the supernumeraries more intelligent? Is the language more decent? Is the moral more valuable, or is there any moral or lesson or information in it whatever?

No. A thousand times no. But herein lies the whole gist of the matter. The puppy-dog drama is cheap and mean and ignorant. The whole scope of it lies well within the limits of the ordinary managerial and histrionic understanding. It calls for no artistic quality of the higher sort. The qualifications for it are a little personal eccentricity, a certain degree of mechanical proficiency, a good deal of bustle, a large share of impudence, and a strong spice of vulgarity. These characteristics are as common as dirt, and the possessors of them are as plentiful as sand upon the sea-shore. Thus it comes to pass that worthless plays—the word must be employed for lack of another—are given more satisfactorily than plays which demand a higher form of executive ability, and the public gives them the preference because it would rather laugh unrestrainedly at natural idiocy than undergo the boredom of a dull travesty of serious emotions. In other words, when it goes to see what is commonly called

a farcical comedy, it has a definite idea of the nature of the entertainment to be provided. If it cannot laugh with the players, it can at least laugh at them, and laughter, on any provocation, is preferable to the torture of seeing a score of incapables struggling with a task immeasurably beyond their reach.

It would be the height of unreason to expect managers to implant new tastes and instincts in mankind, but they can assuredly modify, foster, or improve those which already exist, and are under a moral obligation to labor to this end. If they deny their power or responsibility in this direction, they necessarily abandon the solitary plea which distinguishes them from a circus man or an alderman. If the stage is incapable of exercising any salutary influence as an educator; if it cannot contribute to the cultivation of the literary sense, or the admiration of what is noble or pure; if it cannot quicken imagination, give fire to ambition, or heighten appreciation of what is beautiful in form or color; if it has no historical, moral, or intellectual value, let it be thrust ignominiously out of all companionship with the arts, and branded as a worthless and pernicious impostor. But the evil lies not in the institution, but in the men who degrade it. The true sphere of the stage is indicated by the genius of the men who have written for it and about it, of the men who have acted upon it, and the men who have patronized it. Its capacity for good is undeveloped, because the men who control it, and most of the players who live by it, are equally unable to comprehend or supply the requirements demanded by the art which they profess. In literature, sculpture, painting, the pulpit, or the law, special training, special qualifications, are thought to be necessary to success. How is it with the ordinary manager or actor of the present day? Let us think for a moment what the equipment of a good actor, that is to say, a man fit for a responsible position in a good stock company, ought to be. To play in comedy, he ought to know how to comport himself like a member of civilized society; his enunciation and pronunciation of his mother tongue ought to be refined and correct; he ought to know how to walk, how to bow, how to enter a room and leave it, how to be polite without servility or affectation, how to convey an impression of ease without swagger or self-assertion. These things are elemental, the very A B C of the society primer, and yet how few of our young "comedians," as they are called, evince the slightest acquaintance with them. How many of them are able to stand even the simple test of a dress-coat? When a severer draft is made upon their accomplishments, when, for instance, they are asked to utter a word or two of French or any other foreign language, or to mention some name famous in ancient or mediæval history, the result demonstrates only too plainly the narrow limits of their learning. What chance is there for an art whose illustration is intrusted to dolts such as these?

Or, suppose that our actor has to bear his part in a tragedy. Is it hypocritical to wish that he should have some slight acquaintance with the laws of meter and rhythm in the delivery of blank verse, or exhibit occasionally some perception of the significance of gesture? Would it not be well, if the impersonators of noble Greeks and Romans knew something about the garb and manners of those ancient races; if they

could, for instance, avoid the embarrassment entailed by a search for the trousers pockets which do not exist, and many other similar blunders arising from total and helpless ignorance? But, says the reader, these are the baldest and stalest platitudes! Possibly they are. But whose fault is that? The facts are notorious and cannot be ignored. Exaggeration in dealing with this subject is almost impossible. The actors of to-day, as a class, are ridiculously unfit for the positions which they occupy. A lawyer who knows nothing of law, an artist whose mind is a blank with regard to color or perspective, a clergyman who has read no theology, or a compositor who has never handled type, is an inconceivable anomaly; and yet actors, who in their ideal perfection are required to portray the manners, emotions, and physical and mental peculiarities of men and women of all climes and customs and ages, are, for the most part, persons without any special natural qualification for their calling, without learning, without studiousness, and without taste.

There are, of course, honorable exceptions, or the stage, as a regular institution, would have vanished long ago. There are men and women who dignify the profession by their scholarly acquirements and spotless personal character. Some of the older players—not always those whose names are printed in the largest letters—are profoundly versed not only in theatrical knowledge, but in literature and art generally. There are younger actors, too, of natural ability and refinement, who have adopted the stage, not because it offers the possibility of a livelihood to drones and profligates to whom all other kinds of employment are refused, but for the sake of the art itself, and with the honorable determination to win fame by patient and persevering merit. These are the men who will in the future labor for the regeneration of the stage, and who now prevent it from sinking into a deeper slough of degradation and disrepute; but they are as yet an insignificant minority. If any one wishes to convince himself of the intellectual rank of the bulk of the body of actors,—ninety per cent.,—let him visit the places where they congregate, listen to their conversation, and observe their manners, and he will no longer wonder why dramatic art languishes. In a company constructed of material such as this, a man endowed with the ordinary amount of culture and intelligence which would enable him to occupy a respectable position in one of the learned professions—and not much is wanted for that—shines with astonishing brilliancy in contrast with the surrounding dullness. So soon as he meets with a character which happens to agree with his own personal peculiarities, and which he can therefore play satisfactorily without acting at all, his goal is attained. From that moment he becomes a star of greater or less magnitude, and, having surrounded himself with actors of incredible badness as an effective background for his own two-penny talent, he thenceforward revolves around a fixed orbit, year after year, endlessly repeating the one wretched performance, changing the name now and then to beguile the innocent. Even with stars of the first class the case is not much different. Some of them, indeed, present masterpieces—but in what a fashion! It is customary to compare these luminaries of the stage to whales among minnows. Sharks would be a more striking and apter simile. Their voracity is

one of the greatest barriers to the progress of the stage. They loudly lament the decay of the legitimate drama, the while they are doing their best to burke it. They demand for their services sums so exorbitant that the manager can only make a profit by reducing all other expenses almost to the point of zero. He has no money for competent actors, or decent scenery, or anything else. The star has taken it all to console himself for the depravity of the public taste which rejects a monologue when it wants a play. Other stars, whose love for art is more practical, provide themselves with a competent company and adequate scenery, rightly arguing that, even if their immediate profits are smaller, their repute with the public will stand higher and their fame be more lasting. Diamonds, be they ever so bright, are never dimmed by proper setting.

The ills wrought by the star and combination system are too evident to need discussion or enumeration. The responsibility for them rests mainly upon the managers, who, with their wonted obtuseness and lack of sagacity, have combined almost unanimously to support a policy which will surely work their own discomfiture. They have sown the wind, and some of them are beginning to feel the approach of the whirlwind already. Without their coöperation, the star system, which threatens to abolish the manager altogether, could never have been organized, for the wandering stars would not have had any theaters to play in. It is perhaps not too much to say that the managers are practically responsible for the existence of the stars themselves, for nothing but incapable management could enable a few men of third- or fourth-rate capacity to swell and fatten at the expense of the rest of the profession. Of all the men and women whose names head the list of traveling theatrical organizations to-day, there are not twelve, perhaps not more than six, whose ability is in the slightest degree remarkable, or whose removal would be of any consequence. Why does the public support them? Because it can get nothing better, and must have relaxation. How did incompetent actors advance to the dignities and profits of stardom? Through mean, ignorant, and spiritless management, which permitted the rank and file of the profession to sink to its present debased level.

There have been great managers in the past—Charles Kean, Macready, Phelps, and many others less familiar; and there are some able managers in this country, but only two or three of them are in actual service. Most of them have been forced into retirement by the folly of their associates, or have quietly stepped aside, content to wait for the time when the present rotten system will collapse and legitimate methods come again into vogue. It will not be long before some of the hot-headed youngsters who are now rushing to the front find the end of their tether. They are no more entitled to the name of manager than the men whom they manœuvre to that of actor. What would any one imagine to be the necessary attributes of the ideal manager? He ought certainly to be a man of brains and good taste; he ought to know something of the history of the stage from its inception; he ought to be well read in dramatic literature, ancient and modern; he ought, at least, to know where to look for authorities on questions of architecture, decoration, or costume; his literary sense ought to be cultivated sufficiently to enable him to discern the true quality of

the dialogue in plays submitted to him; while his judgment ought to be almost infallible in distinguishing between what is actually dramatic and what is only imitation. He ought to be, moreover, a man of good address, with a character strong enough to insure him the respect of his company and subordinates, and with sufficient executive ability to keep the general direction of everything in his own hands without assuming the overwhelming burden of minor detail. How many of our present theatrical managers fulfill all or any of these conditions? How many of them would be welcome in a drawing-room? How many of them can boast of any cultivation in any direction whatever? It would be easy enough to specify managers whose names are synonyms for brutal ignorance, coarseness, and immorality, but nothing is to be gained by it, as the names are well known, especially to "the profession which they adorn." As for the men who make dates and lay out routes, contracting to deliver a certain company at a particular spot on a certain day which is decided months beforehand, they are not managers at all, but parasites, of whom, perhaps, we may some day be joyfully ridden. They contribute, as parasites always do, to the general decay of the object preyed upon, but are altogether too insignificant for present consideration. Some of them venture to hire companies of their own now and then, in which case they become speculators—a name which in itself suggests a theatrical pest. The really capable managers can be counted on the fingers, and, being in so small a minority, have no power to effect reformation; and so the theater and all its interests are temporarily at the mercy of men perfectly incapable of any real sympathy with it.

It seems, then, clear enough that the only way to reform the stage is to reform the managers, and the only question is how to do it. There are indications that the solution of the problem has already been begun. The appearance of Mr. Irving in this country is likely to prove of incalculable benefit. He has exploded for all time the nonsensical notion that the public cannot appreciate the best work. His company, for all-round excellence and versatility, is probably the best ever seen here, and its existence demonstrates beyond cavil the possibility of keeping a good company together and making money at the same time. What Mr. Irving has done, American managers can do—not the pert and empty agents of to-day, of course, but their successors. And, what is more, the public, having learned what good acting and good management are, will be content with nothing less, and will soon be taking the question of stage reform into its own hands. To meet the higher standard of taste established by Mr. Irving and managers of his stamp, it will be necessary to form stock companies as of old, and many of the stars of to-day will return to their proper places. As soon as good stock companies are established at the principal theaters, the occupation of the wandering star is gone. He will make much less money, doubtless, but he will be paid quite as much as he deserves; and men of far greater capacity, but less favored by fortune hitherto, will be paid according to their deserts. As for the good plays which are in so much request, they will make their appearance when there is a demand for them. The only thing to do with a good

play nowadays is to lock it up. The impending reformation will not be wrought in a day, nor a year, but there is no lack of signs of a coming change for the better. The managers who read them aright will reap great advantage; the managers who neglect them will admit, when the day of grace is past, that public taste can be improved a great deal more quickly than they believed to be possible.

*J. Ranken Towse.*

#### Natural Gas Wells.

NATURAL gas wells have been common in the oil country for years. Their use and value have not been understood by the public until within a short time past. The people are now surprised to learn what a valuable fuel they have so long neglected, and with that reckless energy characteristic of the country are sinking wells in every direction. The district of natural gas covers a much greater area than that of oil. In general, it may be said to include a section of country extending from western New York, through Pennsylvania into West Virginia and Ohio and lying nearly parallel to the Alleghany mountains. The width of this section varies considerably. The boundary lines are very irregular, and are being rapidly extended by the finding of new wells. While the outlines inclose a large territory, gas is found in only a small portion of it, and then in spots and narrow belts or lines. When a company concludes to drill for gas, the first and most important thing is locating the well. As was the case with oil, there are a number of theories concerning the formation of natural gas, and the deposit of the sand-rock in which it is obtained. In this the "practical man," having more faith in luck than science, does not agree with the geologist. The only satisfactory explanation of the formation of the gas is that it is produced by the decomposition of vegetable matter deposited in the carboniferous age. Geologists say the gas district seems to be a vast caldron filled with deeply buried carbonaceous matter, subjected to great heat, and therefore constantly generating gas, which has been condensing for ages in the strata where it is found. They believe the strata to be general formations in this section, and doubt whether a well was ever put down without finding some gas, or at least where it might not have been found had the well been drilled to a proper depth. The experience of the "practical man" strengthens his belief in the belt theory. The degree of uncertainty accompanying its development has a strong fascination to his venturesome spirit; and the term "gas life" has now all the attractions of the "oil belt" of former days.

The general course of the oil districts is north-east, on what is known as the forty-fifth degree line. Profiting by this knowledge, the gas prospector ran lines from old "wild-cat" wells, where gas had been found, out of the oil country, and discovered that they marked the same general direction.

In locating a well, a survey is usually made, and the well is placed as near to the line as possible. Two such lines nearly parallel, running from Washington county, Pa., through the city of Pittsburgh, up the Alleghany valley, on either side as far as Kittanning, and on to the upper oil regions, are tolerably well defined. At several points a number of good wells are

found upon them, and a larger number of dry holes upon either side and between them. The drill has demonstrated the fact that the oil- and gas-bearing rock is deposited at intervals only, even on well-defined belts. The same is true of these lines, as good wells and dry holes are found upon them within a short distance of each other. So that locating a gas well is still very much a matter of chance.

The process and tools used in drilling for gas are the same as used in boring for oil. The gas-bearing strata are soft, pebbly sandstones, which dip toward the south. At Kittanning the wells are eight hundred feet deep; at Pittsburgh, forty-four miles south, they are sixteen hundred feet deep. In good territory, when the rock is perforated, the gas rushes out with great force. Instances are reported where this force was sufficient to throw the drilling tools out of the well. The latest case of the kind was the Westinghouse well, at the East End, Pittsburgh. This well was plugged for three days, shortly after gas was struck. When the plug was drilled out, the tremendous force of the gas threw the ponderous tools, weighing over three thousand pounds, out of the hole and fully three hundred feet into the air. This pressure varies. With the well shut off, it has been known to reach four hundred and fifty pounds to the square inch. The quality of the gas is not the same in the different wells. In some it is light and dry, in others it is wet and heavy. Most wells throw out a quantity of salt water, which contains a heavy precipitate that sometimes clogs the hole. To prevent this, the wells are entirely closed a few minutes each day, until a strong pressure is procured, when it is suddenly opened. The rush of the liberated gas through a short escape-pipe carries the precipitated matter with it, and the wells by this means are kept open. Near to the well the gas goes through a strong iron tank. The object of this is to catch the water-drip from the well, and prevent its passing into the distributing pipes, where it would freeze in the winter time. The objections to the use of natural gas in dwellings are the high pressure on the pipes, and consequent danger of leaks and explosions, and the fluctuations of the pressure. (It is well established that the pressure in the well is weaker in the morning and stronger in the afternoon. A general fluctuation is also noticed, simultaneous with the changes of the moon.) These objections are overcome by the use of automatic valves, which reduce the pressure and regulate the flow of gas. From these valves the gas is distributed through the town in the same manner as the illuminating gas, excepting that a high-pressure line is run to mills and factories. The pressure for dwellings is about one pound, for boilers and furnaces from thirty to forty pounds.

At Kittanning, Pa., natural gas is used almost exclusively for heating purposes—in stoves, heaters, open grates, under steam-boilers, in the foundries, and in the puddling furnaces at the iron works. It is also used for lighting the streets. The method giving the best results consumes about twelve parts of air to one of gas. This is done by means of an air-globe placed at the end of the burner, which is usually a piece of iron pipe, closed at the further end and perforated with rows of small holes. The globe has inlets for the air, and by the action of the gas through it the air is drawn into the burner and mixes with the gas

## Three Comments on the Stage.

By a mere accident, three interesting comments on the modern stage have been made by contributors to THE CENTURY within a very brief period. In January Dr. Gladden and Mr. Towse made some severe criticisms; in this number of THE CENTURY one of Mr. Howells's characters speaks his mind on the subject. The general tone of these three utterances is neither complimentary nor reassuring. Dr. Gladden merely suggests an offset to the lower influences of the stage, while Mr. Howells's man expresses a passing, but very positive opinion. Mr. Towse alone goes into the question of direct remedies, and his remarks are worthy of serious consideration, for he is, especially, a "friend of the stage," and by profession a student and critic of it.

We have often thought that if the habitual denouncers of the stage and its associations really knew their subject, they could prepare a much more telling bill of indictment against it than any we have yet seen from such sources. In proportion as they do know their subject, are their criticisms effective and useful. But the usual perfunctory "attack upon the theater" is apt to be a vague, rather ignorant and indiscriminating essay, which offends persons of knowledge and common sense, and naturally infuriates the actors of every grade and standing.

The fact is that the modern stage is probably a little worse and certainly much better than its customary condemners have any idea of. The mistake they make is to suppose that the whole thing is corrupt, objectionable, and removable. Acting may be called the oldest art, as it is the most popular—and, at its best, one of the most useful and commendable. It came a great while ago, and will doubtless stay as long as this globe is habitable. It is, moreover, a very trying profession,—we are inclined to think the most trying. Some of the worst people in the world are on the stage, or in some way or other connected with it,—some of the most ignorant, vicious, and pernicious,—and also, we verily believe, some of the best.

We heartily wish that literature were better, *all the way through*, than it is. There are many very good books and periodicals in the world; but there are a great many abominable ones, and their number increases year by year; they are sold cheap, circulate widely, and do no end of harm. We heartily wish that the stage were better than it is, *all the way through*; but we know of no medicine that is sure to work its perfect cure. Every one in any way associated with it, whether behind or in front of the foot-lights, should do his part toward "improving its condition," for its condition, as reflected in the three comments we have printed, is evidently in great need of improvement. The present tendency of some of our best writers of fiction to write plays for actual presentation is a hopeful sign of the times. As for ourselves, if sticking pins in here and there, and speaking an encouraging word now and then, in the future as in the past, will do any good, the stage is welcome to our services!

In suggesting, as above, a comparison between literature and the stage, we do not mean to imply that the theater and general literature are in every way comparable. The theater should rather be compared with the literature of amusement—say with fiction. Even as thus compared we fear that it would be at a disad-

vantage. While there may be more that is degrading in current fiction, there is perhaps less that is elevating in the stage of to-day. In other words, take together the bad and the good of current fiction,—while the bad may sink lower than anything one is likely to see on the stage, the average of fictional literature would probably be found to be better and more elevating than the average of theatrical entertainment. One cause of the vulgarizing tendency of much of the amusement offered in our theaters may be found in the double nature of dramatic representation. The stage is compounded of two arts—that of the author and that of the actor. Even when the author does worthy and refined work, ten chances to one his characters will be debased by actors without culture of mind, soul, or manners.

Authors, actors, and managers are alike under obligation to the public to give better entertainment than is now the rule; as Mr. Towse has shown, they cannot throw their own personal responsibility upon the public shoulders, for there is no "art, profession, or business in which public credulity, ignorance, or folly is accepted as a valid excuse for non-performance of duty." But neither can the public rest blameless if it accepts without protest an inferior article.

After all, the surest way to "elevate the stage" is to elevate the audience. The stage, like the press and like literature generally, will be apt to take its tone from the community to which its appeal is made. If the community will demand a better class of theatrical representation it will get it.

## Overmuch Wisdom.

A STORY is told of a conservative clergyman who was present at a woman-suffrage convention when a terrible thunder-storm arose, and who made haste to interpret the storm as an expression of the wrath of God against the "infamous work" in which the reformers were engaged. Thereupon the aged negress known as Sojourner Truth is said to have retorted: "You ain't acquainted with God." The parson was silenced, of course; what reply could be made to such a challenge? "Answer a fool according to his folly," says the wise man. The reply of Sojourner was a good specimen of this style of controversy. Does the wise man mean that none but a fool can effectually answer a fool? Certainly we do encounter, now and then, examples of unreason so gross that it seems useless to attempt any rational response. The clerical expounder of the thunder-storm furnishes a specimen of this stupidity. None but a densely ignorant person would have ventured thus to declare the final cause of a natural phenomenon of this nature. A "Master in Israel" who knows no more than to assign moral reasons for particular meteorological changes has not yet learned the alphabet of Christ's religion. Such reasons there may be; but the power to discover and reveal them does not belong to man, and he who undertakes to exercise such power makes an enormous assumption. Knowledge of this kind could only be derived from an immediate prophetic revelation. Respecting the general course of nature, we may be able to affirm confidently that it is under divine guidance, and that the outcome of all its forces is good. Strauss himself asserts that "order and law, reason and goodness" are the soul of the universe; and Matthew Arnold declares