

HOME AND SOCIETY.

Parlor Plays.

MR. EDMUND W. GOSSE, one of the younger members of the choir of English singers, after having ventured on a tragedy, has now written a play in verse, for amateur actors of tender years. Mr. Gosse has called his play "The Unknown Lover," and he prefixes to it an essay on "The Chamber Drama in England." By the term "chamber drama" he means plays written for amateur actors and acted by them; and Mr. Gosse sets forth a goodly list of chamber dramas, beginning with Daniel's "Cleopatra," and certain of Ben Jonson's masques and the "Comus" of John Milton. Parlor players and private playwrights can find in Mr. Gosse's list a noble pedigree; and they will find there, too, this defense of the amateur actor: "The taste for acting seems inherent in the human mind. Perhaps there is no imaginative nature that does not wish, at one time or another, to step into the person of another, to precipitate his own intelligence on the action of a different mind, to contemplate from the interior, instead of always observing the exterior. To act a part is to widen the sympathy, to increase the experience, and hence the diversion of private theatricals has been held to be no small part of education by some of the most serious of men." Mr. Gosse does not here make mention—as well he might—of the Latin play annually performed at the Westminster Public School, nor of the custom, well-nigh universal in schools of the last century, of getting up a play, in which the scholars acted, while one of the teachers recited a prologue or an epilogue of an elegant Latinity, and of his own making. Nor in his list of private plays does he put the first English comedy, "Ralph Roister Doister," by Nicholas Udall, of King's College, Cambridge,—where Queen Elizabeth, in the summer of 1564, was entertained by the performance of a later play of the same writer's, a tragedy, "Ezechias," a sacred drama founded upon the Second Book of Kings. Nor did Mr. Gosse—being a Briton, alas!—put in his list "The Mercenary Match," a tragedy "written by Barnaby Bidwell, Esq., and played by the students of Yale College, under the auspices of the late Rev. Ezra Styles, D.D., president." "The Mercenary Match" is one of the earliest of American plays, and is qualified by Dunlap, the historian of our stage, as a "very pleasant and laugh-provoking tragedy."

Mr. Gosse's play is much what might have been expected from the preface, although, as is often the case, the portico is more imposing than the edifice behind it. "The Unknown Lover" is in blank verse; its four acts are contained in thirty-one openly printed pages; it is simple and altogether slight, and reminds one of the pretty and unpretending little proverb-plays of which the French are prolific, and which they wisely limit to one act. But in spite of its slighthness, "The Unknown Lover"

would on occasion serve; in a country-house full of children at Christmas, or in a summer hotel where there were four bright young people fairly in their teens, it might be attempted with success.

For children of a larger growth, young men and maidens, in the spring when vagrant fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love, and therefore feels the need of something higher in tone and fuller of poetry than the ordinary dialogue play, what can be better than the fairy comedies of Mr. W. S. Gilbert? They are in general easy to mount and to dress. "The Princess" is perhaps too involved, and "Pygmalion and Galatea" is doubtless too difficult; but "The Palace of Truth" and "The Wicked World,"—why are not these just the thing for ambitious amateurs? In "The Wicked World" there is but one scene for the three acts; it may be noted, also, that the author has even chosen to obey the pseudo-classic unity of time, and the single action of his play takes place in its one scene, within the space of one day.

And this suggests another remark. In the ever-changing and ever-improving physical conditions of the stage, it has at last become evident that it is always advisable and generally possible not to change the scene during the act; that is, to play each act in a single scene. And this principle has been applied to old plays as well as new,—even to Sheridan and Shakspeare. "The School for Scandal" has been arranged, with but very slight alteration, to be shown in five consecutive scenes. And in all the recent magnificent revivals of Shakspeare's plays an attempt has always been made to bring them, too, under the new conditions, and with singular success. It cannot always be done, but a great simplifying of action and place is possible. This is what those who have prepared the new acting versions of Shakspeare have tried to do. Those who prepared the old acting versions—Colley Cibber, David Garrick, John Philip Kemble—had no such idea, and their alterations of Shakspeare (the regular acting edition, as it is called) is now not merely a little behind the times, but wholly out of date. And therefore, amateurs who intend rashly to risk themselves in a Shakspearean play, or wisely to confine themselves to a single scene from Shakspeare, will do well to avail themselves of the aid of the series of "Prompt-Books" of standard plays, as acted by Mr. Edwin Booth and edited by Mr. William Winter. Here they will find the result of the collaboration of literary skill and trained technical knowledge of the theater; and this result approaches closely the ideal acting edition of Shakspeare.

In this department, in the number of this magazine for November, 1877, a writer gave a list of French plays suitable for reading aloud or acting by American amateurs, vouching for their innocuousness and seeking to combat the notion that the dramatic literature of France is wholly given over to the

devil. A few additions to that list are here made. "Le Piano de Berthe," of Barrière; "La Fée," of M. Octave Feuillet; and "Un jeune Homme qui ne Fait Rien," of M. Legouvé, are in one act; the last little comedy is in verse, but it is easy and flowing verse, not very difficult. In two acts is "Le Gentilhomme Pauvre," by MM. Dumanoir and Lafargue, a charming and especially to be recommended play, of which the English version is called "The Poor Nobleman." In three acts there are "Les Vivacités du Capitaine Tic," an amusing and lively little comedy by M. Labiche, and "Par Droit de Conquête," a vigorous and virile play, by M. Ernest Legouvé, interesting and healthy. Among the longer and more important French dramas which the American young lady may safely venture to read are "Les Faux Bonshommes," of Barrière; "Le Duc Job," of Léon Laya; "Le Marquis de Villemer," of George Sand; and "L'Honneur et l'Argent," the fine rhymed comedy of François Ponsard.

Other volumes have been issued of the "Théâtre de Campagne," the two earlier volumes of which were highly commended in the paper in the November number. They contain various little plays in one act, in prose and verse, with two, three, and four parts each, sparkling and airy, and likely to suit the taste of the general reader and the amateur actor. A comedy by M. Henri Meilhac is not so innocent; but I doubt whether any honest American girl could see deep enough into the Frenchman's wit to detect any harm in it, and so its presence need not rule out the volume which holds it. Besides these comedies, there is a poem by M. Alphonse Daudet, the author of "Jack," called "Les Prunes;" it is written in triolets, and is the first instance of a poem of eight stanzas written successfully in this most difficult and peculiar meter.

ARTHUR PENN.

A Short Essay on Washing.

EXPERIENCED housekeepers very seldom give clear and positive instructions in housework. Their success seems to be the result of some uncommunicable knack. Years of experiment and uncertainty appear to be required in reaching positive knowledge in regard to housework, and that a knowledge which must die with the discoverer.

Whoso desires to escape all uncertainty in one important department of housework, is recommended to read the following complete guide to the whole art of washing.

To begin with, clothes should not be soaked overnight; it gives them a gray look, and the soiled parts lying against the clean portions streaks them. Before beginning to wash, the clothes should be assorted, and the fine ones kept separate all through the washing. Rub the clothes in warm—not hot—water. Hot water sets, instead of extracting, the dirt. Turn them and rub them till perfectly clean in the first water. If the water becomes much soiled, throw it out and take fresh, for if the water is allowed to become very much soiled, the clothes will be dingy. The clothes should then be rubbed out as thoroughly in the second as in the first

water. No amount of rinsing or boiling will ever make clothes white which have not been thoroughly rubbed out.

After the second rubbing, put the clothes in cold water to boil, without rubbing soap on them or putting soap in the water; they are soapy enough. Too much soap makes clothes yellow and stiff. As soon as they begin to boil, remove them to the "sudsing"-water. If they boil long, they will be yellow. Let each article be well "soused" up and down in the sudsing-water, rubbing them out thoroughly with the hands, to get the suds out; wring dry and throw in the "rinsing-water," which is the last water. Let this be slightly blued. Excessive bluing is the careless washerwoman's refuge. The rinsing is to be as thorough as the sudsing.

After rinsing, starch. The old-fashioned idea, that clothes require to be dried before being starched, is not sustained by intelligent observation. Dip the articles in boiling hot starch, plunging the hands constantly into cold water, to prevent their being scalded, and rubbing the starch well in.

Next hang out, and be sure to stretch every inch possible to the sun and the wind. Garments hung double, or in bunches or festoons, will not bleach.

Wash flannels in lukewarm water, and rinse in water of the same temperature. Avoid rubbing soap upon the flannels. Stretch them, when thoroughly clean, snap them energetically, and hang them up immediately,—by the fire if the weather is bad. Two waters are enough for flannels.

When sprinkling clothes, dip collars, cuffs, and shirt-bosoms in cold starch, made so thin as to look like water with a little milk in it. Clothes starched thus need no wax, lard, nor other preparation to make them iron easily. A smooth, dead white is generally more highly esteemed now than the glazed look which shirt manufacturers give to their linen.

Clothes washed by the above directions will be white as the driven snow.

MARY DEAN.

ALL-WOOL dress goods or colored flannels should be washed out quickly in tepid water, rinsed in water of the same temperature, wrung dry, and then folded up for a time, together with one or two sheets, so that the moisture shall be extracted by the cotton or linen; they should then be ironed till dry. A patent wringer (made of India rubber rollers, which can be adjusted) is almost indispensable in washing. It does not wear the clothes like the twisting and wrenching of hand-wringing, and saves the most exhausting part of the wash, besides leaving the clothes drier than can be the case with ordinary hand-wringing.

Salt or beef's-gall, in the water, helps to set black. A table-spoonful of spirits of turpentine to a gallon of water sets most blues, and alum is very efficacious in setting green. Black or very dark calicoes should be stiffened with gum-arabic,—five cents' worth is enough for a dress. If, however, starch is used, the garment should be turned wrong side out.

S. B. H.