

Away in full speed then the King galloped gaily.
 The Abbot, in puzzling his brains, now wrought daily ;
 No criminal doom'd to law's fatal decree
 E'er felt more distracted, more downcast than he.

To three universities sent he full speedy,
 Each learned profession consulted he greedy,
 Great promises made, large sums paid in gold,
 But none, e'er so wise, can the problems unfold.

In sad mood the Abbot, desponding and sighing,
 Now counted the hours, and the days, and weeks flying ;
 The weeks grew to months, the fix'd period drew nigh,
 His rest became broken, and sunken his eye.

A hollow cheek'd Werther, and solitude seeking,
 To the forest's deep haunts is the Abbot seen creeping.
 When pond'ring one day in the heart of a wood,
 Jack Bendix, his shepherd, before him there stood.

Quoth Jack, " Please you're rev'rence, it sorrows me greatly,
 " To see how you're thin as a shadow grown lately.
 " Saint Mary ! Saint Joseph ! Oh why must it be
 " That your grace so bewildered I always now see ? "

" Ah, honest Jack Bendix, the truth will I tell thee :
 " To work out a wonder the King doth compel me,
 " And gives me three nuts as a pastime to crack,
 " To effect which e'en Beelzebub couldn't find the knack.

" The first—when as Monarch, in pomp he is greeted,
 " With crown, and with robes, on the throne he is seated,
 " In costly regalia—then must I denote,
 " How much he be worth, to the tenth of a groat.

" As second, he gives me to promptly unravel,
 " How soon round the world on fleet steed he may travel,
 " Exact to a minute. An abbot so wise,
 " He says, ought quite ready an answer devise.

" As last, which, poor priest, I can never get over,
 " He gives me his thoughts to a hair to discover,
 " He 'll faithfully own them ! yet must I be heard,
 " To prove in those thoughts from the truth he has err'd.

" And can I not solve this hard task he has given—
 " Of title and dignity shall I be riven ;
 " Astride on a jackass, his tail in my hand,
 " I then, seated backwards, must ride through the land."

" Is this all," cried cheerly Jack Bendix, " to vex you ?
 " Make easy your mind, nor let trouble perplex you,
 " Just lend me your crook, cap, and vestments so fine,
 " I 'll hie to the King, and the answer divine.

" With Latin, 't is true, I 've not one word to hoax him,
 " Yet know I the dog from the fireside to coax him ;
 " With that knowledge which wise men with gold cannot buy,
 " Long ago by my grannam acquainted was I."

Away ran the Abbot, with joy, in a hurry,
 Crook, vestments and cap, bringing forth in a hurry ;
 And deck'd in the monk's sacerdotal adornment,
 Jack away to the King's, tho' by no means forlorn, went.

With sceptre and crown, on his throne the King seated,
 In costly regalia, with homage is greeted.

"Ha, welcome, sir priest, come now strictly denote,
 "How much I be worth, to the tenth of a groat?"

"For pieces of silver, just thirty in number,
 "Our Saviour was sold. Then my wits 't will not cumber,
 "At twenty and nine if your value I guess,
 "You 'll surely admit that one piece you 're worth less?"

"Humph," pondered the King. "Faith thy answer is ample,
 "Thy words to the haughty may serve as example.
 "Yet I pledge thee my kingly word, ne'er since my birth,
 "Could I have supposed I so little was worth.

"But now take thou caution, and promptly unravel
 "How soon round the world on fleet steed I may travel,
 "Exact to a minute. An Abbot so wise,
 "I 'm sure can quite ready an answer devise?"

"At sunrise exact, if on fleet steed you 're mounted,
 "And keep the same pace with the sun, I have counted,
 "And stake crook and cap on 't, that sure as a gun
 "In twenty-four hours the journey is done."

"Ha, ha!" laugh'd the King, "thy expedient is clever,
 "With ifs and with ands thus to answer me ever ;
 "The wight who with ifs and with ands fills his head,
 "Can convert straw to gold, as the ancients have said.

"But now for the third. With the answer be ready,
 "Else must I award thee the trip upon Neddy.
 "What thoughts do I cherish this moment, untrue,
 "Thine ifs and thine ands I opine now won't do?"

"That I 'm the lord Abbot, you now are supposing ;
 "You think this the fact, yet the truth wants disclosing—
 "For know, save your Majesty, there your thoughts lie,
 "Jack Bendix, the Abbot's poor shepherd, am I."

"The devil— thou art not the Abbot," loud grumbled
 The King, and as if down from the skies Jack had tumbled ;
 He view'd him, paused shortly, then call'd out with glee,
 "Well then, from henceforth, thou lord Abbot shalt be.

"With crook, and with ring, among Abbots he counted,
 "On an ass be thy dull predecessor straight mounted,
 "And learn the sound doctrine "quid juris" to keep.
 "The husbandman sows long before he can reap."

Quoth Jack, "Under favor, such grace will do never,
 "Nor reading, nor writing, could I compass ever ;
 "Of Latin, so needful, not one word know I,
 "And too old I 'm to learn, for my school-time's gone by."

" Ah, honest Jack Bendix, would this were not wanted.
 " Beseech then some favor—I promise it granted,
 " For much hath amused me thy *ryghte merrie* freak ;
 " I fain would reward thee. What would'st thou then ? Speak."

Said Jack, " Please your Highness, low is my condition,
 " My wants are but few—hear my humble petition !
 " A free and full pardon I crave for my lord,
 " If such be your pleasure, this be my reward."

" Ha, bravo friend Jack ! on all points I 'm defeated,
 " Thy heart, like thy head, in the right place is seated.
 " The Abbot a pardon I grant full and free—
 " And now this provision I fix on for thee :

" From henceforth as shepherd no more be thou straying ;
 " We charge the lord Abbot, by fasting and praying,
 " To keep thee in comfort and ease till the day
 " That death—the all-vanquisher—calls thee away !"

C. N.

OUR COLONIAL DRAMA.

AMID the Fine Arts, the Drama has invariably ranked deservedly high in the estimation of every nation, ancient and modern : so conspicuously distinguished, indeed, its recognised position, that according to its vigour or degeneracy, the vigour or degeneracy of the people has been wont to be inferred.

If we trace back the history of England, and England's dramatic literature, we shall readily perceive the force of this reputed axiom. Turn we, for example, to the age of Elizabeth, historically and dramatically. In the first, and greater division, we contemplate England on the pinnacle of fame and fortune, her mighty energies developing themselves in numberless and stupendous ways—her enemies disgracefully overthrown—her amity courted—her councils venerated—her arms triumphant—her statesmen and philosophers paragons of wisdom, and her dauntless navigators paving the way for those gigantic discoveries that have since comparatively annihilated time and space. Turn we next to her Theatric position, and when, in the history of the world, was the stage ever similarly ennobled ? Even without mention made of Shakspeare—the poet, not of one age, but for all time—we are overwhelmed with the glorious galaxy of dramatic worthies. " Rare Ben Jonson," Massinger, Ford, Beaumont, Fletcher, Middleton, Decker, and other lesser stars, all devoting their transcendent talents in noble illustration of a noble, soul-inspiring art. Follow we the career of England for another century, until we light upon the rule of her second Charles : he, for whose *blessed restoration*, her priesthood even yet offer up their periodical prayers ! Need we contrast her then moral, social, or political greatness, with that of the proud era of her virgin Queen ? or her dramatic poets with those of Shakspeare and his sparkling cotemporaries ? Alas ! how shrunk in honor and in intellect the sovereign and his court ! How dwindled in vigour and in reputation the nation and her councils ! Whilst her drama, prostituted to a licentiousness corresponding with the prevailing degradation, presents but emasculated and ribald testimony to the grovelling sensuality of the evil days whereon it had fallen. Sufficient may be gleaned from past example to demonstrate the force of the by-no-means singular belief, that upon the exalted or degraded tone of dramatic writing and dramatic representation, much of a sound or unsound public taste depends.

It may be argued, and indeed frequently has been, that dramatic taste is on the wane. Of this we profess to be somewhat more than sceptical, inclining to think, however, the form and figure of the art may have undergone the degree of mutation incidental to all human inventions—that its first principles are still as vigorously active, if not more so, than ever.

If, sorrowfully, compelled to concede a diminution of play-going habits, we still refuse to acknowledge such admission as any proof of estrangement of public taste from dramatic literature, however conclusive of a diminished regard for dramatic representation, because, if Drama be but a "name of all compositions adapted to recitation and action," a vehicle "in which are displayed, for instruction and amusement, all the passions, feelings, errors, and virtues of the human race, in real life," then may we boldly affirm, that at no period of English literary history was dramatic taste ever more in the ascendant than now. We do not, in this assertion, mean to limit ourselves to tragedy, comedy, opera, or farce, but include those *enlarged dramas*—the novels and romances of the day, which issue by thousands, and whose success, in such shape, is entirely dependent upon the amount of dramatic skill evinced in their construction—an incontrovertible truth clearly demonstrated by the facility wherewith the most brilliant volumes of Scott, Hook, Cooper, and others, have been adapted for scenic representation—a facility admitted by Hook, who himself converted a drama of his own into one of the most effective illustrations of his celebrated "Sayings and Doings," simply because the bookseller evinced more liberality than the manager! The stage, however, was not so to be deprived of its tribute, the tale having been retwisted into dramatic form by a female hand, to the delight of applauding thousands. The shape, therefore, of dramatic entertainment is, we contend, *all* that has varied; and though much of its brilliancy and effect must, questionless, be lost by a mental instead of visual realisation of its action, still the reader of a modern romance, carrying as he does from the circulating library, the dialogue, scenery, machinery, dresses, and decorations of the piece, is only left to enact his monologue by the chimney corner, instead of at a more public bench in the temple of Thespis. This change is, by all true lovers of a great and thrilling art, one deeply to be deplored, because it strikes cruelly and fatally at a vocation of old and cherished renown, inflicting at the same time an equally careless wound upon the time-honored stage. To quote an able and intelligent modern writer—

"The moral influence of dramatic representations on the manners of a people is far greater than may generally be supposed; and in our opinion, there is no class of persons more deserving of public esteem than those censors of histrionic performances, who sit in judgment on them, and conscientiously award their praise or censure. Both dramatists and managers who endeavour to exalt the character of the stage, cannot be too highly commended or rewarded, while such as ignobly study to gratify a depraved taste, are fit objects for the severest reprehension."

With this brief induction, we proceed to comment upon that particular portion of Theatrical affairs over which we take the liberty to assume a self-elected censorship. In breach of ancient usage, we abstain from any customary motto—not that we dislike those quaint and frequently apposite indices, but because we have too often witnessed critics who, whilst meekly professing to "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice," have nevertheless *contrived* to indulge petty spleen or personal pique, to the great and unmerited disparagement of deserving writers, or mean and contemptible laceration of the feelings of intelligent and meritorious performers. Such a practice it shall be our conscientious endeavour sedulously to eschew. We shall always be but too happy to commend where commendation is deserved, and where the critical rod *must* be applied, it shall be administered in all sincerity and good faith, the great aim of the critic, in our apprehension, being to encourage, not to cow—temperately to point out defects, not to flay the defaulter—to cull a beauty rather than glean to torture a deformity.

The Drama is a sensitive plant, liable to shrink from rude contact, whereas a fostering hand and generous smile is sure to develop its genial graces, and call all its latent energies into full and hopeful play.

Since the days of Barrington, the Australian stage has made gigantic strides, for now both Melpomene and Thalia are enshrined within a temple, worthy even

of imperial London. To speak soberly, the Pitt-street Theatre is a very complete one—furnished with a spacious and even elegant auditory, and with all the stage mechanism and appliances calculated to the illustration of the most intricate scenic effects. Of the manner of the general *mise en scene*, it is not now our cue to speak. Some pieces have been fairly, others wretchedly mounted; and even the best, in their minute details, (and it was by sedulous attention to minute details. and to the perfection, in entirety, of dramatic pictures, that the Theatric Magician Vestris achieved such marvellous triumphs,) have been susceptible of great improvements. It is vain, for instance, to lavish care or cost upon the court or costume of a Prince, if his cortège be habited in a nondescript style of vesture, which, if donned on the 5th of November, might entail some personal hazard to the adventurous and motley wearers.

The dramatic horizon has of late somewhat brightened, and an increased public liberality has been the reward of a slight managerial outlay. A glimpse of better judgment and a ray of purer taste is beginning to show itself in the selection of plays, and, as we have said, there has been a partial effort to put them appropriately forward. A little more spirit, and the offering might have been rendered complete. In any matter, half measures are perilous. In theatrical ventures they, in the long run, are generally fraught with ruin.

Of the company, our present space will only allow us to state that, as a body, they are held in favorable estimation—many most deservedly so: indeed, there are one or two who may fairly challenge comparison with the best British provincials.

For industry, indefatigability, and courtesy, as Stage Manager, or for assiduity, zeal, and intelligence in a profession, of which he is no mean ornament, we know no one better calculated to fill his onerous and invidious office, than Mr. Simes. Ever at his post—ever pleasing—generally excellent—it is small marvel that he should occupy so warm a place in the regard of our play-goers.

Foremost of the histrionic roll stands Griffiths, a gentleman of mind, manners, and education—a performer, of whose merits we entertain so high an estimate, that our wonder is to find him a leader on the Sydney, and not the London boards. Griffiths is no mere stage player—no brainless, mechanical mummer, acquiring a given number of lines by rote, to be afterwards enunciated with a certain amount of gesticulation, garnished with sundry sawings and twitchings, and so palmed upon the groundlings for *acting!* No! Griffiths is none of these. He is the artist as well as the actor. Blending sound judgment with clear discrimination and natural taste, he appreciates the graces and the delicacies of his arduous profession. He has a soul to feel, and the genius to pourtray, both its poesy and its painting, delineating lights and shades of character with the practised skill of an accomplished votary, animating his portraitures with the flash of intellect and the polish of art. Frequently have we beheld him by the mere energy of a gifted mind dragging an infinitely inferior character into marked prominence, casting the hero or heroine into helpless obscurity. Mr. Griffiths' versatility of talent, too, is remarkable; in fact, he is the veriest pack-horse of this rude establishment, the weight of whose burthens he (and another we shall presently name) is made to stagger under. It is a common, but a very short-sighted managerial policy, to *press* an eminent actor and popular favorite into everything. This is termed *strengthening the cast*, but in acquisition of this *strength* can managers be so purblind as not to perceive how much they endanger the attractions of a sterling actor, by forcing him into characters unworthy of his genius, and in which he is denied the legitimate exercise of his powers? Mr. Griffiths is continually thus before his audience—at one moment the classic Roman, in the next the third-rate burglar of some fiftieth-rate melo-drama—then the Hawthorn of opera—the buffoon of low comedy, and make-weight of secondary farce. Out upon such mongrel mal-arrangements. Restrict Mr. Griffiths, Messieurs Proprietors, to his own prescriptive walk—make him the feature he unquestionably is, and *he* will make *your treasury* the richer. Degrade not the most accomplished performer that ever trod the Australian stage to the level of a common drudge. Be more chary of his reputation, less free of his inferior exhibition, and you will find the multitude will then discover—ay, and appreciate—that talent so conspicuous to the discerning few. Some there may be inclined to question the superiority we arrogate for Mr. Griffiths, pointing to