

THE DRAMA.

It is not necessary to refer at great length to Miss Farr's initial venture at the Avenue Theatre. In the interviews which were launched before the opening of the theatre, Miss Florence Farr seemed to predict a new theatrical era, but so far the promise has not been fulfilled, and the first night of the 29th of March will be remembered as one of the most tumultuous on record. Partly this was due to the fact of Miss Farr having suppressed the orchestra, an innovation which the public greeted with loud expressions of disapprobation, but partly the plays, and in some measure the acting, were responsible for the discomfiture. *The Land of Heart's Desire*, by Mr. W. B. Yeats, is no doubt a fanciful little play, that will read well, but is entirely devoid of dramatic qualities. Evidently the author has studied Maeterlinck; but Maeterlinck is a dramatist as well as a poet, and Mr. Yeats at present seems not to be familiar with the requirements of the stage. Nor was his fancy acted in the right vein. The actors were scarcely audible at times, and harmony of tone, which is an absolute *sine qua non* for the delivery of such pieces, was wanting, and several of the interpreters, whom we will do the favour not to name, did not even do justice to the rhythm of Mr. Yeats's blank verse.

The piece was unfavourably received, but this was nothing in comparison with the fate which awaited Mr. John Todhunter's *A Comedy of Sighs*. After the *Black Cat*, expectations as to Mr. Todhunter's future work ran high, and it cannot be gainsaid that when *A Comedy of Sighs*, a charming title, was announced, everybody looked forward to something witty, and delicate, and subtle. Unfortunately by straining it too much the bow has given way. The same clever talk, which was one of the main attractions of the *Black Cat*, the inclination of the personages towards epigram-mongery, the smart sayings, the unconventional twist of all the characters bored the public, because one could evidently feel that the author was not sincere, that he had sat down with the purpose to be witty. Nor was the subject to the liking of the public, or, for the matter of that, to our own taste. Women of the *Dodo* type, women who are loveless, women who, with one exception, have all the airs and manners of the demi-mondaine, women hard and flighty, women who, for a whim's sake, would imperil their domestic happiness by listening to the tempter

who tries to seduce every lady he meets with the same finely concocted confession of love, such women are repulsive, and they become hateful when represented, as Miss Farr did, without one atom of charm, and with an absolute unconsciousness of the humour which the author had put into the character. Here and there was a diverting scene, and notably Mr. James Welch, as a parson, who believes emphatically in the music-hall as an element of popular education, gave a very clever performance. The character was overdrawn, and we defy Dr. Todhunter to show us a clergyman, who would so far forget himself as to behave like a low comedian in Lady Brandon's drawing-room, as Mr. Welch did. It is a great pity that Dr. Todhunter's play should have so badly failed, and that, in a certain measure, the management to whom he entrusted it should be responsible for this defeat. For, after the *Black Cat*, it seemed as if the gates of our theatres would be widely opened for a new dramatist, and now, we are afraid, he will knock again a long time in vain at the sesame.

At the Haymarket Mr. Tree has produced a version of Ludwig Fulda's now celebrated play *Der Talisman*, translated and adapted by Mr. Beerbohm Tree in collaboration with Mr. Louis N. Parker. *Once Upon a Time*, as the English title is, did not achieve much more than a *succès d'estime*, and before these lines appear in print it will have been replaced by a work by Mr. Sydney Grundy.

Why did *The Talisman* achieve a comparative failure in England whilst in Germany it was a gigantic success? The reason is not far to seek. Germans are passionately fond of fairy tales, they are brought up with them as it were, and even grown-up people in Germany like from time to time to be brought back to the days when they were children. Moreover, *The Talisman* in German was a fine piece of poetry written in classical form, yet in essentially modern style, and besides it particularly amused a certain fraction of German playgoers who, in the king who plays the main part in the tale, saw a satire on the Emperor. When the play came to England the satire, of course, had lost piquancy; we do not take sufficient interest in the German Emperor to applaud a caricature of his character; and, then, fairy tales are not very much to our liking. We would not mind reading again Andersen's lovely little story of the "invisible coat," on which the plot is based, but to have to listen to a fairy-tale during a whole evening is asking rather too much. To put it in one word, we are too matter-of-fact for this light, bright, fanciful, but flimsy fare. Perhaps, if the adapters had been more conscientious in the fulfilment of their task, if they had not cut away pages and pages of the dialogue, which would have lengthened the piece, but also strengthened the portrayal of the characters, if they had stuck to Mr. Ludwig Fulda's graceful form of verse, instead of giving us a prosy version, interspersed with