

A most uplifting evening

"THE DRUNKARD"

WE have as we write no means of knowing what the verdict will be of our esteemed colleagues in criticism, Mr. Walkley, Mr. Clement Scott, or Mr. Bernard Shaw in his "Saturday Review," concerning the great American drama (in five acts) by W. H. Smith and a Gentleman, namely "The Drunkard," which the Company of Questors this week represented for our post-Yule delectation at their salubrious little theatre in Ealing, Middlesex. But as to ourselves, the verdict is translucently clear.

This tract from the New World does for us brook comparison with the major playwrights of our age, with Mr. Pinero, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, even—we will be bold—with Mr. Ibsen. And we go further. We can envisage no possible representation in the metropolis, be it illuminated by Messrs. Tree, Alexander, Waller and Forbes Robertson, by the nonpareil Sir Henry, or by Miss Terry, Mrs. Campbell, Miss Vanbrugh, Miss Neilson and Miss Achurch, which would excel that given us here. Mr. Shaw might perhaps put in a plea for his Duse (though scarcely, we suspect, for the "divine Sarah").

We learn from our handbill that "The Drunkard" has come to us directly from Barnum's Waxworks and Museum, New York, while Miss Craik, who interprets the role of the heroine, has favoured us with a personal appearance immediately following her transatlantic tour. Of the success of the tour we could entertain no doubt when, after taking our seats, admiring the rococo proscenium with its elegant prohibition "Defense de Cracher," and observing in due patriotism the national anthem for our beloved Queen Victoria, we beheld on the rise of the curtain that Miss Craik was indeed fitted to impersonate "a village beauty." And we shall cherish, to speak more specifically of her histrionics, her rebuke to the villain of the piece, Lawyer Cribbs: "Were my husband lying drunken at my feet, he is still a man whose shoes you are not worthy to unloose."

One of many

The lady's triumph, however, was but one of many. At no point was our disapprobation of Cribbs (splendid Mr. Imbusch!) more heartfelt than when, in the very first scene, he juxtaposed a quotation of the sublimely Scriptural "When I was a child, I thought as a child" with an expectoration of tobacco into the fireplace. This blasphemy was only equalled, we suggest, in the almost unbearably brutal gin-parlour episode, full of sickening acts of violence perpetrated by truncheon and custard-pastry, where Mr. Drake—as the sinner of the title—uttered the disgraceful witticism "I'll have a gin sling, that's what killed Goliath."

Mr. Drake had, dare we breathe it, a trifle more trouble than his colleagues in assuming a dialect indigenous to the Americas. Frequently we detected him reverting to his native woodnotes wild, which have in the past fallen upon our ears in Beaumont and Fletcher as gently as any sucking dove: nay, as any nightingale. In the passages of alcoholic stupor, on the other hand, he seemed to be adopting less the accents of Mayfair London than the accents of Londonderry; although curiously the potation he was supposedly imbibing was brandy rather than Irish whisky. These phonetic insufficiencies do not, we hasten to add, detract from the poignant veracity of Mr. Drake's portrayal of the "dissipated collegian"; his moving epitaph for a dead old man, "Peace to his bones!"; his agonized self-questioning when tempted back to Demon Rum, "Dare I go? Must I go? Is it really for the best?"; his cry of despair on confronting a family tragedy, "Death in the house!"; his yearning for the presence of his spouse, "Hark, hark, my Mary"; above all, his picturesquely noble avowal "I would rather perish on the nearest dunghill than commit forgery."

Exigencies of space permit us merely to list the manifold further joys of this diversion. For instance, Miss Price's spinster Spindle, whose boudoir toilette of talcum, throat-spray and dentures alas did little to prevent her revealing to us a countenance reminiscent of the rearward portion of one of our invaluable hansoms. Her outburst "Spirit of Lucrezia Borgia!" was something to remember, as was Mr. McQueen's laudably virtuous confession, in the part of the hero's foster-brother, "I'm so modest I always go to bed without a candle." Miss Oscar, as his demented sister, made us long to see her in Ophelia; and Mr. Smith as the philanthropic *deus ex machina* brought the tale to a proper end of Christian charity. Words such as "You are a man, and if a man, my brother," or "He who lifteth a fallen fellow creature from the dust is greater than the hero who conquers the world," send us from the theatre wiser in soul.

Teetotal quartet

Finally let us commend Mr. Green's realisation and Miss Venus's scenic depictions; the Teetotal Quartet (Mrs. McQueen, Miss Boyd-Taylor, Mr. Boyd-Taylor and Mr. Barrett) for its melodiously moral interludes; the invigorating wedding dance (which, who knows, may lead in the coming twentieth century to a whole new form of American musical spectacle?); and last yet not least, Mr. Kirby senior's apt pianoforte renditions ranging from "There is a Tavern in the Town" to "Here's a Health unto his Majesty."

This was, in short, an offering without flaw. The famed French homily "Drink," as presented several years ago at Drury-lane in Mr. Charles Reade's English translation, still burns bright in our mental recollection. But ah, friends, "The Drunkard" has surpassed it.

MR. McVAY.