

THE STAGE.

STAGE NOTES.

MR. IRVING'S Lyceum season of 1888—which closed last Saturday—can be memorable only for Miss Ellen Terry's performance in "The Amber Heart," which was remarked upon in the ACADEMY, many weeks ago, as one of the most engaging and pathetic things done on the stage in our time. Of "Faust"—as Mr. Wills has turned it—critical London had certainly had quite enough before Mr. Irving's return from America; and the great actor's performance in "Robert Macaire," quite other than that which was given by Frederick Lemaître, has certainly added nothing to his reputation. We look forward now, and with considerable hopefulness, to next season. It will not begin until December, for Mr. Irving goes a long provincial tour during nearly the whole of the autumn, and Miss Ellen Terry takes a great rest, to which, as Mr. Irving said in his speech, her labours of the last few years eminently entitle her. But when the actor has finished his provincial work, and the actress her holiday, there is to come that revival of "Macbeth" which has so often been spoken of, and which we have more than once ventured to urge. It is now a dozen years since the piece was played at the Lyceum. Mr. Irving was not then fully accepted as a Shakspeare actor, and Miss Bateman was the Lady Macbeth.

ON Monday M^{me}. Sarah Bernhardt re-appeared in London, bringing with her, as her *pièce de résistance*, "La Tosca," and, as a sufficiently substantial *entrée*, so to say, M. Dumas's "Francillon." "La Tosca"—considered as drama and not as performance—is a curious instance of M. Sardou's habit of compromise between art and somewhat vulgar popularity—between what it is best to do and what is surest to pay. The elements of tragedy are certainly in "La Tosca"; but it is wholly without restraint, and it is without any charm of beauty. Certain of its scenes are of a gross and undesirable realism, such as the actors have a struggle with to make them not agreeable, indeed—for they could not be that—but even endurable to people of taste. And we are not talking of the squeamish. The squeamish are no more people of real taste than the vulgar are; each is equally one-sided and ill-balanced. But the "Tosca" is not a pleasant play even for men and women who look at things broadly. It does give, however, beyond a doubt, a good opportunity enough for seeing more sides than one—though never quite the best side—of Sarah Bernhardt's art. The two middle acts afford the great actress her greatest opportunity. In the first and in the last she is disappointing. And admirable as is her command of passion, one of the most naturally delightful instruments with which she expresses it—we mean her "golden voice"—is no longer exactly what it was. A score of years of labour—journeys across several continents—artistic experiences on the whole somewhat exhausting—have deprived, at last, it seems, the exquisite voice of something of its quality. But that can have no effect whatever on the "drawing" powers of M^{me}. Bernhardt as a star. To herself and to critical people who take note of her method, she remains a great artist. To the big public—which, in the days when she was, perhaps, most exquisite, did not know her at all—she has become the most successful show that traverses the land.

CORRESPONDENCE.

WHAT IS A TRAGEDY?

Hamlet Court, Southend: July 7, 1888.

I think we are getting very "mixed" in our definitions when Mr. Hall Caine describes my play of "Partners," founded on Daudet's novel

of *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné*, as a melodrama, and thereupon suggests that a melodrama should be so called because it does not end in the death of the leading character. The difference between tragedy and melodrama is in reality technical. The first is a form of art where the old unities of time and place are generally preserved, and where the action moves grandly and monotonously towards the final consummation, foreshadowed from the outset, of a sublime death; in which, moreover, all the interest is subordinated to the one central purpose, to the one solemn issue—generally spiritual and ennobling, and the very essence of which is moral or religious concentration. A melodrama, on the other hand, is a varied picture of life and incident, a *mélange*, a mingled web of thought, passion, and character, and may or may not end tragically—the point being that its style and treatment, not its catastrophe, differentiate it from tragedy. The great Sophoclean trilogy is tragedy pure and simple. Most of Shakspeare's serious plays—notably "Macbeth" and "Richard III."—are melodramas. Such masterpieces as "Hamlet" and "Lear" are of twofold character, extremely melodramatic in their style, highly tragical in a certain monotony of characterisation and moral suggestion. Of course, the more popular and etymologically correct definition of melodrama—i.e., drama accompanied with musical effects—will scarcely serve us here; but it is a good and right definition, if we insert the word "varied" before the adjective "musical," and imply that the drama itself is many-mooded.

I learned with deep regret that Mr. Hall Caine's fine play, quite tragical in its character, had been vulgarised and made absurd by a "happy ending." There is a superstition among managers that "happy endings" can reform a serious and monotonous theme, and render it pleasing to the vulgar; but the truth is, the public care little how a play ends, so long as it is not depressing, and deficient in relief, throughout. A very popular and not quite worthless play by the late Watts Phillips, "Lost in London," is a case in point. The piece is a melodrama, though the end is tragical in Mr. Caine's sense; but the action throughout is all alive with life and comedy—effective if very conventional, so that average spectators enjoy it, and do not by any means resent the heroine's pathetic death just before the fall of the curtain. I think Mr. Caine should have nailed his colours to the mast, standing or falling by the absolutely and inherently tragic nature of his theme. To change the dominant note at the last moment into a doubtfully lively one, was something like singing through all the magnificent verses of the "Old Hundredth," and then suddenly breaking into "Haste to the Wedding." Fortunately, this is an error which can be easily corrected, for the preservation of a piece which has justly received high encomium.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

MUSIC.

RECENT CONCERTS, ETC.

MR. RALPH STUART gave a Chopin recital at the Prince's Hall last Saturday. It is a mistake to frame a programme wholly from one composer's works. A great player like Dr. Bülow could not, even with Beethoven, prevent his recitals from becoming somewhat wearisome. M. de Pachmann, a Chopin interpreter without an equal, once gave a Chopin concert; but he profited by experience, and never repeated the experiment. Mr. Ralph Stuart, however, is young, and may be forgiven. He has much to learn, and something to unlearn. His *technique* is excellent, he has a pleasing touch, and shows taste. He was unwise in attempting such pieces as the Allegro de Concert (Op. 46), and

the formidable octave Etude in B minor (Op. 25, No. 10), for they can only be effective in the hands of a pianist for whom mechanical difficulties have ceased to exist. He was heard to considerable advantage in some of the Préludes, the Fantaisie Impromptu, and the G minor Ballade. Mr. Stuart announced that the recital would consist of "works entirely by Chopin" but the scales and *coda* in the D major Mazurka, the left-hand octaves in the E minor Valse, were certainly not Chopin's. The audience was very enthusiastic. If Mr. Stuart puts himself in good hands, he will become a first-rate pianist.

Herr Richter gave his ninth and last concert on Monday evening, and for the fourth time Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" was performed under his direction. A few weeks ago the Richter Choir did not particularly distinguish itself in Berlioz's "Faust," but the choral singing was better on Monday. The tenors and basses were, however, still weak. Of course, one cannot expect anything like perfection from an ordinary choir in such an impossible work. Beethoven was so occupied with the music, so bent on "detachment from the terrestrial world," that it probably never occurred to him that he was writing for human not heavenly beings. Instead of finding any fault with the performance, we ought rather to thank Herr Richter for attempting so difficult a work with the vocal means at his command. One must hear this Mass from time to time so as to keep in mind the fullness of Beethoven's genius, as manifested during the last years of his life. There may be dull moments in the Mass, there may be moments of effort, but there are pages which for strength and grandeur surpass all that he ever wrote. The soloists were Miss Anna Williams, Miss Lena Little, Messrs. Lloyd and Henschel; and thoroughly well did they acquit themselves of their difficult task.

A performance of Nicolai's opera, based on Shakspeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor," was given at the Savoy Theatre on Wednesday afternoon by the pupils of the Royal College of Music. Nicolai, like Flotow, wrote several operas, but with one only did each achieve fame. Nicolai's opera, produced at Berlin forty years ago, is still popular in Germany. Sir John Falstaff and the buck-basket, fair mistress Anne, and the merry wives have no doubt much to do with the success of the piece; but the music itself is extremely clever, graceful, and pleasing. The composer always expresses himself with the greatest ease, and the orchestra follows pretty faithfully the action on the stage. It must, however, be confessed that, now and then Nicolai gets dangerously near to *opera-bouffé* style. The opera served admirably to show what the Royal College pupils could do in the way of acting and singing. Miss Annie Roberts was an excellent Mrs. Ford; her voice is clear, and shows the results of good training—a little harshness in the upper notes may have been the result of nervousness. Her acting was lively and amusing. Miss Maggie Davies as Anne Page deserves commendation; she was much applauded for her air in the third act. Miss Roberts was well supported by Miss E. Squire as Mrs. Page. Mr. W. C. Milward made a good Falstaff, and was not too much padded out; he sang well, especially in the earlier part of the opera. Mr. Price sang in an artistic manner, but his voice—perhaps the result of cold—seemed muffled. Mr. Fernor (Dr. Caius) and Mr. A. C. Peach (Slender) made much of their parts. Mr. Kilby (Fenton) was not always a tuneful lover. The chorus was good, and the piece was well mounted. There was a very pretty ballet given by the children of M^{me}. Lanner's academy. The orchestra, under the careful direction of Prof. Stanford, consisted principally of students.

J. S. SHEDLOCK.