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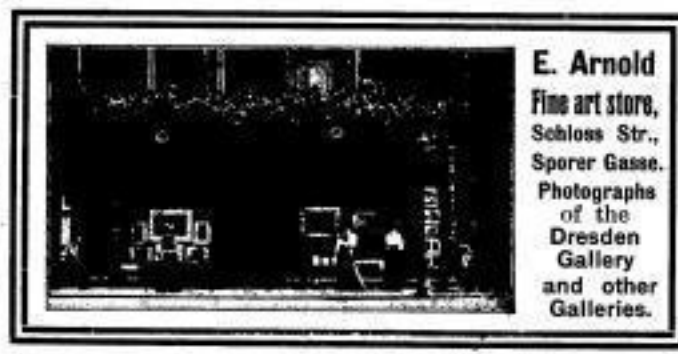
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THE DEARTH OF PLAY- WRIGHTS.

(From our London correspondent.)

For some weeks four plays by one and the same author have been running together in London. The author is Mr. W. Somerset Maugham and the plays are "Lady Frederick," "Mrs. Dot," "Jack Straw," and "The Explorer." Against the author and his plays there is not a word to be said. If Mr. Maugham could succeed in running a dozen plays at the same time and reaping an income almost as great as that of any leading publisher or pickle manufacturer there would still be nothing to say against him. He is justified in making the best of his opportunities; it is even his duty to do so. But if there is nothing wrong with Mr. Maugham there must be something wrong with London. Mr. Maugham is not, and, I think, does not profess to be more than a playwright who writes to amuse us. He writes most amusingly, to be sure. He has a pretty wit, a neat ingenuity, a certain pathos—all of them things which are very admirable. He is not, however, a social reformer, a stage reformer or a preacher under any disguise. Among dramatic authors he is what Mr. F. E. Smith, K.C., M.P., is (or was, for tastes change rapidly) among politicians—an adroit young man with a strong faculty for making people laugh by means of a quite respectably intellectual method of titillation. Mr. Shaw could make one laugh by an even more intellectual method; Shakespeare could make one laugh, or cry, even more worthily than Mr. Shaw. Yet neither Shakespeare nor Shaw hold the undisputed field; Mr. W. Somerset Maugham does. Why? The answer is very simple. People go to the theatre with the sole motive of being amused, and Mr. Maugham amuses them. Mr. Shaw also amuses them—for a time; Shakespeare also amuses them—for a time. But to seek amusement at the risk of having also to feel gloomily sentimental or morbidly thoughtful constitutes a deterrent always present with plays which have body; and it is a deterrent which sufficiently deters the majority. A great deal of nonsense has been talked, and unfortunately also written, lately about a change in the character of playgoers. The people who are constantly readjusting the social divisions in order to accommodate their shifting perceptions or to tone down the colour of some social defeat, have been discovering that the audiences in theatres are no longer the same. The old audiences, who liked and understood good drama, stay in their suburban homes and do the gardening; the smart people, being composed entirely of successful chandlers, money-lenders, book-makers, cosmopolitan Americans and degenerate aristocrats, occupy the stalls and clamour for vulgarity; while the pit, the circles and the gallery, crammed with all kinds of stupid people, indecently poor, ignorant, conventional, snobbish, sentimental and banal clap or hiss in harmony with their so-called "betters" in the stalls and boxes, thus doom-ing for ever and ever any intelligent attempt at artistic drama. The admirable ones can only with difficulty be drawn out of their suburban gardens to attend the Stage Society's plays on Sundays; they are so sick of the whole business that they no longer attempt to agitate against the unspeak-ability of the public taste; matters go from bad to worse, and, to crown all, Mr. W. Somerset Maugham, who is no genius but merely a little sparkling, a little original and a little human, becomes the autocrat of the managers.

That is one of the current analyses of our dramatic backwardness, and it is, strangely enough, somewhat of a favourite with unsuccessful authors for the stage. It may be true, although personally I think it is not; but if it is true, it is only a part of the truth, not the whole of it. The other part of the truth, and much the most important part, is the fact, patent and lamentable, that we have no authors, no new blood. Given good material, you are bound to draw once more to the theatre the best class of playgoers (supposing, for the sake of argument that such a class exists and has been alienated by the persistent output of rubbish). Good material need not neces-sarily be garishly new or revoltingly morbid; an author like Wedekind, for instance, would never



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find a place on the English stage. A touch of originality, a new vein, healthy, pleasant, not too fantastic, something that will not shock the consistency of British stage traditions—here are a few simple conditions for a successful and good new play. Such plays are produced and are popular; "The Mollusc," "The Education of Elizabeth," "Diana of Dobson's," and many others, are at once competent in workmanship and profitable from the business standpoint. They are not great drama certainly, but they are not bad drama either. Anything too ambitious, too loaded with ideas or idealism would be a risky speculation. A Somerset Maugham play (and when I say that it does not matter whether Mr. Somerset Maugham or some other pleasant person wrote it I have said the worst) just hits the public taste. Surely, the public taste might do, and has done, worse. Mr. Somerset Maugham is writing so many plays because the other young authors are too ambitious or too incapable to write similar ones.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

HOUSE OF LORDS.

London, July 21.

Viscount Midleton asked whether the Government had adhered to the declaration recently made by the Secretary for War that no further reductions of the Regular Army were in contemplation.

The Earl of Crew: My reply is in the affirmative, but at the same time the circumstances under which the question is asked, I think, make it desirable that I should say a few words in explanation. The question is in itself a somewhat unusual one, because it has relation to the Army Estimates. I conceive the reason for asking it is the existence of certain rumours which have reached the newspapers. Political small talk and rumours of this kind—what the late Lord Beaconsfield called "Coffee House Babble"—are very apt to concentrate upon one office. I think it would be desirable, in the public interest, to state what has actually happened in this case. What has been going on has simply been an ordinary inquiry into the general expenditure, and has not been confined to one department, such as the Government is bound to make from time to time. We are as alive as the noble lords opposite to the needs of the defence of the country and I think that it will be found that we have devoted quite as much attention to the subject, if not more than, any Government which has existed before our time. It is perfectly true we are bound in the matter to study economy in the matter of the defensive services so far as we can, but we certainly do not intend to sacrifice efficiency to economy (cheers).

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

London, July 21.

Mr. H. C. Lea asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether he was aware that Admiral Lord Charles Beresford was chairman of John Henry Andrew and Company (Limited), Toledo Steel Works, Sheffield; whether it was permitted by the Admiralty that naval officers on full pay could engage in any form of business whatever; and would he state whether the firm above mentioned had during the last five years received any contracts from the Admiralty, and, if so, the value of such contracts in each of the five years respectively.

Mr. McKenna: The reply to the first part of the question is in the affirmative, according to the latest published information. Naval officers are not forbidden by the King's Regulations to engage

in business, but are forbidden to have any pecuniary interest or personal advantage in contracts for the supply of goods to the naval service. There is no record of any contract having been placed by the Admiralty with this firm during the last five years (Opposition cheers).

Mr. Lea: Arising out of that astonishing reply—(cries of "Order").

The Speaker: The hon. gentleman is not entitled in asking a question to make remarks on a reply. If the hon. member has another question to put let him put it courteously (loud cheers).

Mr. Lea: In deference to your remarks, may I say the reason I said it was astonishing was because I understood that no officers or men on full pay in the British Navy—

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member is now arguing. He had better put down any further question.

Mr. Macneill asked the Home Secretary whether the ladies sentenced to various terms of imprisonment in connection with the agitation for women suffrage was not merely compelled to wear clothes in prison which had been worn previously by ordinary women convicts, but were likewise deprived of their boots and shoes and compelled to wear boots worn many times by ordinary women convicts, which, of course, could not be boiled or washed, like the clothes, did not fit, and often caused blisters.

Mr. Samuel, who replied, said all the clothing supplied to these ladies was either new or clean. New shoes were supplied in every case. If any complaint that they did not fit, or that they caused blisters had been made they would have been immediately changed, but no such complaint had been made.

Mr. Macneill: Is the hon. gentleman aware that they make no complaint no matter what their grievances?

Mr. Samuel: I fail to see how the grievance is to be remedied unless it is brought to the attention of the authorities.

Mr. Stanier asked the First Lord of the Admiralty, with reference to the report of the Treasury Committee upon the subject of national insurance of merchant shipping, and to its conclusion that the latter must depend for protection exclusively on the Navy, and in view of the fact that we had only 67 unarmoured cruisers, most, if not all, of which would be required for service with our battle fleets, would he say how the Government proposed to maintain the security of our trade routes in time of war, and how many cruisers they expect to have at liberty for that purpose.

Mr. McKenna replied that it was not in the public interest that information should be given which would disclose the probable strategical disposition of our ships in war time (hear, hear).

In answer to a question by Mr. Bellairs, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. McKenna, said that the Government had no intention of abandoning the plans of creating a naval base at Rosyth.

Mr. Gretton desired to know if the question of a grant to cover aerial navigation experiments had been considered; whether such experiments were to be undertaken under the supervision of military authorities; and if naval officers were to be consulted on the subject. Mr. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, replied that the entire question was being considered by the naval and military authorities, and that both were coöperating with each other.

THE BOMBAY DISTURBANCES.

Bombay, July 21.

One thousand dock labourers went on strike this morning, but so far no rioting has occurred. The authorities are on the alert, and all measures have been taken to prevent a repetition of yesterday's disturbances by the spinning factory employes.

THE WALFISH BAY QUESTION.

Cape Town, July 21.

Mr. Merriman, Prime Minister of Cape Colony, stated today that the Government did not intend to give up Walfish Bay because of the inadequacy of the arrangements for its defence. On this point, he added, the South African Government were unanimous.

(Continued on page 4.)