

Coriolanus at "The Comedy."

If the revival of Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" had been the only noteworthy Presentment which Mr. F. R. Benson had offered to the London public since his present occupation of the Comedy Theatre, he would have deserved well at their hands! It is now fully half-a-century since this famous drama has been seen upon the Metropolitan Boards, at any rate upon the north side of the river, and even if, at some distant date, it may have been produced at one of the transpontine theatres, no record of such production is easily accessible. To the existing generation of London playgoers therefore, the piece, as an acting and acted play, was, until its current representation, altogether unknown save in the few instances, in which some of them might have seen it when given by the Benson or other Companies at Manchester or elsewhere. In his present revival Mr. Benson had the sagacity, as well as the good fortune, to secure a tower of strength in the engagement of Miss Geneviève Ward to play the important Part of Volumnia the mother of Coriolanus, and certainly it would have been difficult, not to say impossible, to have found any lady in the ranks of the histrionic profession of to-day, who could have sustained that Part with so much tragic force and sincerity. Albeit that in her earlier scenes—as also did her coadjutrices, Miss L. Braithwaite as Virgilia and Miss H. McGregor as Valeria—Miss Geneviève Ward fell somewhat into the modern snare of what I must call drawing-room speaking and acting, yet, as the play proceeded, she warmed up to her work, and ever more and more impressed her audience with the vigour of her expression and the truth of her conceptions. Of Coriolanus himself Mr. Benson gave a most striking embodiment, and, though he may not be quite possessed of the personal attributes necessary for portraying the typical Roman hero, yet he fully atoned for any deficiency in this respect by the strength of his enunciation, the loftiness of his demeanour, and the energy of his movements. Very great praise also must be bestowed upon Mr. E. Lyall Swete for the grace, pathos and power, which he exhibited in the trying part of Menenius Agrippa—a part which calls upon its exponent for almost every variety of expression that an actor can indicate, and scarcely, if at all, are less to be extolled the delineations of the two demagogic tribunes, Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus, by Mr. Asheton Tonge and Mr. Oscar Asche respectively, and that of the 1st Citizen by Mr. G. Weir. The Cominius of Mr. G. Fitzgerald and the Tullus Aufidius of Mr. Alfred Brydone were likewise impersonations redounding greatly to the already established reputation of these gentlemen. To my mind the scenic methods adopted by Mr. Benson are far more really representative of Shakespearian intention than those followed at more ambitious houses, since they enable the audience to follow the piece in the sequence set forth by its author, and do not therefore involve either arbitrary transpositions or the absurdity of speaking words out of keeping with scenery then upon the stage!

That "Coriolanus" should be a drama so rarely presented is not a matter of surprise, when we consider its essentially political, military, and in some respects philosophical character and the difficulty of placing it—as in the case of "Julius Cæsar," and "Henry V." in adequate proportions upon the boards. The fact also that the play can hardly be given, under

our modern supposed conditions, except by resorting to serious excisions is an undeniable drawback to its efficient rendering and consequent interest. Still, Mr. Benson has done all he can to prevent the necessary curtailment from destroying the unity of the piece, and in his management of the stage crowds has displayed almost a miracle of skill when we consider the small amount of the space at his command at the Comedy Theatre. "As You Like It" will follow "Coriolanus."

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

A Book of the Week.

THE INVADERS.*

The outbreak of the South African war, and the unexpected discoveries of the strength and weakness of the British forces, have induced all thinking people to reflect seriously on the probabilities, should England ever be at war with a state more nearly matched to herself than the Boer Republics.

The outbreak of hostile feeling on the Continent, also suggested uncomfortable possibilities; and out of these things, an idea grew in the mind of Mr. Louis Tracy, which he has embodied in the curious book now before us. The march of events has been too rapid for him, up-to-date though he is. Mentions of "The Prince of Wales," already sound old-fashioned, and the suppositious visit of the Kaiser to England is farcical in view of that real visit, which has so touched the very heart of the sorrowing nation.

These things are unfortunate for Mr. Tracy, but in spite of the way the situation has wrested itself out of his hands and changed its form since he wrote his book, the notion therein contained is startling enough to make it very exciting reading.

His idea is, shortly, that the calm self-confidence of the Briton, and his disdain of any kind of precaution—the unquestioned ease with which anybody who likes could land on British territory, and purchase firearms when he got there, would enable France and Germany to send over into this country, a hundred or two at a time, an immense army in mufti, who, on given dates, should concentrate at pre-arranged points and aided by war-ships which would approach unquestioned, war not being declared, would seize on Liverpool, Hull, and one or two other important sea-ports, terrorize the inhabitants by a display of cruelty, cutting down all persons in uniform, police, railway men, &c., seize the railways, cut the telegraphs, and form a cordon right across England, the head quarters being in the Peak district of Derbyshire.

Some of the description is undoubtedly very good, notably the taking of Liverpool, and the sea fights; the most amusing part is, that living persons are made to converse freely, Lord Salisbury, Chamberlain, Balfour, the Duke of Connaught, the Kaiser, His present Majesty, and so on. General Mercier is in command of the French troops, and his "dossier," containing the plan of campaign, is stolen by a clever British officer in the Intelligence Department. His private papers are found to contain letters to him about the Dreyfus case which would utterly ruin him in the eyes of his own country. Then there are two more enterprising Englishmen, who capture Dr. Leyds, or rather kidnap him, in Boulogne, and secure him in Holloway, in spite of the offer of any amount of secret service money!

* By Louis Tracy. Pearson

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