LONDON DRAMA.

A Tragedy in Blank Verse at the Adelphi, with Notable Acting.

London, September 21.

The old Adelphi Theatre has witnessed a post-graduate Bensonian revival this week. Mr. Stephen Phillips, who used to play the Ghost to Mr. Benson's Hamlet, is indirectly responsible for the experiment, for the source of inspiration for Mr. Fagan's "The Prayer of the Sword" has evidently been "Paolo and Francesca." The tragedy of the lovers is staged for mediæval Italy, and there are five acts, mainly in blank verse, with Shakespearian comic relief in the antics and prattle of a court fool. The verse is not so musical as Mr. Phillips's poetic drama, and the situations are more theatrical, the elocutionary passages more didactic, and the love-making scenes less sincere. The Bensonians are trained artists, with resonant voices, and they know how to recite blank verse melodiously. They also have a strong sense of character, which has been developed by their Shakespearian work, and every impersonation has individuality and distinction. There are six of these oldtime strolling provincial players on the Adelphi stage—Mr. Oscar Asche, Miss Lily Brayton, Mr. Lyall Swete, Mr. Alfred Brydone, Mr. H. R. Hignett and Mr. Walter Hampden—and every one labors strenuously and is inspired with genuine artistic feeling. With earnest, intelligent acting and with picturesque scenes and beautiful Renaissance costumes, everything is done for Mr. Fagan's romantic melodrama and if it fails to make a permanent impression it will be because he lacks sustained power of imagination and cannot rise above the level of overpainted melodrama.

The scene of the drama is Andola, an imaginary independent state in the marches of Italy, and the time is the opening of the sixteenth century, when Alexander VI was Pope, Maximilian I Emperor and Henry VII on the English throne. It was the era of the monastic orders and cathedral building, when religious faith was deep and strong, and the children of the Church were trained to habits of unquestioning obedience. It was not an age when monks made love to duchesses and carried them in triumph to the altar; and more tuneful verse than Mr. Fagan's and more convincing acting than Miss Brayton's and Mr. Hampden's are required to render this romance credible. It is true that Filippino Lippi, who was painting frescos in Florence and in Rome during the period designated by this play, was the son of a monk and a nun, and that the marriage of his parents had been sanctioned after they had been released from their religious vows by a Papal bull; but the father was a painter, with Cosimo de Medici as his patron, and the mother had taken the veil against her will and was eager to escape from convent life. This romance of broken vows was a real love affair like the idyll of Paolo and Francesca; but there could never have been the wooing of a sovereign duchess by a pious monk and her acceptance of him as a miraculous deliverer sent from heaven. The spectator knows in his heart that the monk would not have played with his conscience and convinced himself that it was right for him to declare his passion; and that the duchess, reigning in state, would never have thought of marriage with a renegade friar. The romance of "The Prayer of the Sword" is stage made and unreal, and the audience is interested rather than moved by it.

The first act reveals the gardens of San Bruno Monastery, in the Apennines, with a young novice, Fra Andrea, sighing for a life of action, and doubting whether he has made a wise choice in preparing himself for the priesthood. The Duchess of Andola, visiting the monastery with her court, finds the dreamer alone and listens to his ardent talk about fighting for a just cause and becoming her champion; and she leaves him with the admonition that he must use the sword, if heaven ever sends it into his hand. The second act opens in the cloisters of the monastery, on the eve of the monk's ordination as a priest. Six months have passed without a sign for a crusade with the sword, and his mind is at peace. A warrior, who is supposed to be lifeless, is brought in from the road, and the monk watches over the body while his companions are at prayers. The soldier, who is master of horse at court, suddenly revives and cries out that the duchess is in deadly peril and needs a champion. He calls upon the monk to enlist in her cause. "Go forth, and for thy weapon take my sword," he commands, with his dying breath; and the monk accepts it as the long deferred sign and rushes out of the monastery on a mission of deliverance. The scene is shifted to the marble loggia of the ducal palace, with cypresses and fountains under a sunset sky. Scorla, the treacherous gonfalonier, who has assassinated the faithful master of the horse has come to court to demand marriage with the great lady, and will not take no for an answer. The palace is attacked by a ragged madman, with a rabble of peasants behind him, and the gates are opened by the court fool. Fra Andrea singles out Scorla for single combat, but the duchess throws herself between them and promises the traitor his life if he will surrender. Scorla is banished and the monk is proclaimed gonfalonier.

When a month has elapsed Fra Andrea makes a desperate effort to abandon the court and to return to the monastery, and the third act is mainly occupied with a farewell meeting, in which the lovers fall into each other's arms. The fourth act discloses the interior of the Church of San Giovanni, where the marriage of the monk and the duchess is about to take place. Scorla meets there Maddalena, the widow of the Master of Horse, and Fra Bartolomeo, a stern fanatic, bent upon dragging the recreant monk back into the cloisters, and he prearranges an interruption of the wedding and the reception of a special envoy from the Vatican. There is a brilliant wedding procession, with choristers, candles, incense and a mitred bishop, and when the bride and bridegroom are before the altar Scorla forbids the banns and is supported by Fra Bartolomeo. Fra Andrea tells the story of the wounded warrior and the sword sent in answer to prayer, and the bishop accepts it as a heaven sent miracle and consents to go on with the marriage service. At this moment the embassy arrives from Rome, and Fra Andrea is ordered by the Pope to return at once to the cloisters under penalty of excommunication. The monk refuses to obey, and the curtain falls with the frenzied Fra Bartolomeo upon the altar steps hurling the curse of Rome against the rebel, while the courtiers and peasants turn against the Papal messenger and the relentless Scorla. That is an effective curtain, with reminiscences of Bulwer's Richelieu, but a more melodramatic one is in reserve for the fifth act, where Fra Andrea is in the fortress of San Martino without guards and exposed to assassination. The duchess, accompanied by her faithful fool, enters to warn him of his danger, but she has come too late, since Scorla, with another assassin, is already approaching. When the duchess has been concealed the two intruders are allowed to enter under the pretence of having good news from Rome, and Fra Andrea turns upon them, when they attack him, and mortally wounds them. The duchess has wrested a dagger from Scorla's hand and been scratched by it in the neck, and he has his moment of triumph when with dying breath he tells the monk that the weapon was a poisoned one and that the lady cannot live. With the two assassins dead upon the floor, there is a tragic scene between the lovers, and a final tableau shows a white haired monk praying beside a grave in the monastery garden.

Some of the critics on the opening night began to sneer at this tragedy as soon as they observed that there were to be five acts and that some of the blank verse was little better than plain prose cut up into lengths and regularly measured off. The wisest spectators watched the audience and suspended judgment. Only once were there signs of discontent. This was at the end of the fourth act, when the details of Roman worship had been reproduced with unnecessary realism and when the sub-prior of San Bruno was too vehement in passing sentence upon the disobedient monk. Even then the expressions of dissent were neither offensive nor general, and a drama which had apparently gripped the attention of the audience for over three hours was heartily applauded at the close. It might not be a great work, but it was full of action and ideas, with subtle contrasts of character, distinct traces of ironical humor and an uninterrupted growth of interest in the story. It was not only a serious drama produced boldly, not recklessly, at a time when thoughtless musical comedies and vapid farces were popular, but it was also religious drama, with a distinct motive likely to excite prejudice—that of a monk following his conscience, even when he was menaced with the wrath of heaven and excommunication from the Church. The audience was not thrilled at any moment by evidence of genius in the playwright, but it was thoroughly interested in the story and the stage effects and was grateful to him for an ambitious and thoughtful bit of work a long way in advance of romantic drama of the period.

The actors also had the stimulus of effective character parts, which gave full employment for their powers. Mr. Asche as the truculent villain, Scorla, acted with self-restraint and subtle power, and, although he was the acting manager, resisted the temptation to magnify his part. Miss Brayton, as the Duchess, succeeded in putting herself back into the sixteenth century, and, while lacking power in the death scene, was never without charm and tenderness. Mr. Walter Hampden, with his deep, melodious voice and fine presence, was earnest and sincere as the young monk, Fra Andrea, and convinced even listless and bored spectators that a new actor of exceptional gifts had come from the provinces. Mr. Brydone was really powerful as the fanatical Fra Bartolomeo, and Mr. Charles Angelo succeeded in one of the most difficult feats of the evening—that of reproducing the vivacity of the mediæval jester. Mr. Swete saved the situation at what was the most dangerous moment by his delivery of the message when the dying Master of Horse suddenly revived and commissioned the dreamy monk to take the sword and rescue the gracious lady of Andola. The strokes were few, but decisive, and the character sketch was one of the best of the evening. The play was admirably produced, and the incidental music was remarkably good. Its fate will be watched with interest by lovers of old fashioned drama as an indication of the trend of public taste. If it succeeds, Mr. Fagan will have imitators on a higher level. I. N. F.

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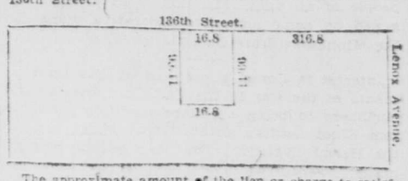
NEW YORK SUPREME COURT, COUNTY of New York.—Adelaide M. Davis, Plaintiff, against William H. Flitner and others, Defendants.—In pursuance of a judgment of foreclosure and sale, duly made and entered in the above entitled action, bearing date the 4th day of October, 1904, I, the undersigned, the Referee in said judgment named, will sell at public auction, at the New York Real Estate Sales Room, No. 161 Broadway, in the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, on the 27th day of October, 1904, at 12 o'clock noon, on that day, by Joseph P. Day, Auctioneer, the premises directed by said judgment to be sold, and therein described as follows: All that certain lot, piece or parcel of land, with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situate, lying and being in the Twelfth Ward of the City of New York (Borough of Manhattan) and being in Section 7, in Block 1920, on the map known as "The Land Map of the City of New York," and bounded and described as follows: Beginning at a point on the southerly line of 136th Street, distant 316 feet 8 inches westerly from the corner formed by the intersection of the westerly line of Lenox Avenue with the said southerly line of 136th Street; running thence southwardly but parallel to the said westerly line of Lenox Avenue, and to and through a party wall so far as the same extends 99 feet 11 inches to the middle line of the block; running thence westwardly but along the said middle line of the block 16 feet 8 inches; running thence northwardly but again parallel to the said westerly line of Lenox Avenue and to and through another party wall, so far as the same extends, 99 feet 11 inches to the said southerly line of 136th Street; running thence eastwardly but along the said southerly line of 136th Street 16 feet 8 inches to the point or place of beginning.

Dated: New York, October 5th, 1904.

MARCEL LEVY, Referee.

SAMUEL T. CARTER, Jr., Attorney for Plaintiff, 18 Wall Street, Borough of Manhattan, New York City.

The following is a diagram of the property to be sold as described above, the street number being 132 West 136th Street:



The approximate amount of the lien or charge to satisfy which the above described property is to be sold, is eleven thousand four hundred and fifty and 69-100 dollars, with interest thereon from the 28th day of September, 1904, together with costs and allowances amounting to three hundred and eighty-one and 39-100 dollars, with interest from October 5th, 1904, together with the expenses of the sale. The approximate amount of taxes, assessments or other liens, which are to be allowed to the purchaser out of the purchase money, or paid by the Referee, is six hundred and ten and 88-100 dollars and interest.

Dated: New York, October 5th, 1904.

MARCEL LEVY, Referee.

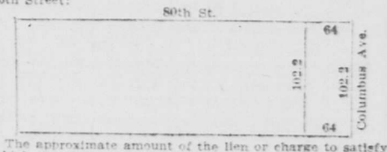
NEW YORK SUPREME COURT, COUNTY of New York.—The New York Life Insurance and Trust Company, Plaintiff, against Bertrem Levyn and others, Defendants.—In pursuance of a Judgment of Foreclosure and Sale, duly made and entered in the above-entitled action, bearing date the 4th day of October, 1904, I, the undersigned, the Referee in said judgment named, will sell at Public Auction, at the New York Real Estate Salesroom, No. 111 Broadway, in the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, on the 28th day of October, 1904, at 12 o'clock noon, on that day, by L. J. Phillips & Co., Auctioneers, the premises directed by said judgment to be sold, and therein described as follows: All that plot of land in the City and County of New York, with the buildings thereon, bounded and described as follows: Beginning at the intersection of the westerly side of Columbus Avenue and the southerly side of 80th Street, and running thence southerly along the westerly side of Columbus Avenue One hundred and two (102) feet, two (2) inches to the centre line of the block; thence westerly along said line sixty-four (64) feet; thence northerly parallel with Columbus Avenue one hundred and two (102) feet two (2) inches to the southerly side of 80th Street, and thence easterly along the southerly side of 80th Street sixty-four (64) feet to the point of beginning.

Dated, New York, October 6th, 1904.

JESSE STEARNS, Referee.

EMMET & ROBINSON, Attorneys for Plaintiff, No. 52 Wall Street, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York.

The following is a diagram of the property to be sold as described above, the street number being 100 West 80th Street:



The approximate amount of the lien or charge to satisfy which the above-described property is to be sold is Three hundred and sixty-one thousand five hundred and twenty 86-100 dollars, with interest thereon from the 23rd day of September, 1904, together with costs and allowance amounting to Three hundred and ninety-nine 92-100 dollars, with interest from October 5th, 1904, together with the expenses of the sale. The approximate amount of taxes, assessments or other liens, which are to be allowed to the purchaser out of the purchase money, or paid by the Referee, is $5,995.39 and interest.

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