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MR. TALMAGE ON THE STAGE.

When Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage preaches about theatres—as he did last Sunday—he presents a spectacle which is entertaining, and positively instructive. He begins by pretending that the evidence upon which he bases his conclusions against the theatre is purely hearsay. He claims that he has personally seen none of the wicked plays which he denounces from his pulpit. Thus Mr. F. De Wittless Talmage places himself on one of the horns of an uncomfortable dilemma. In case he has not personally seen any of the plays he so bitterly condemns, his judgment of their quality is totally without value. If, on the other hand, he has seen them, then we are compelled to the conclusion that Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage tells lies.

The burden of Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage's last sermon about the stage, is that it is degenerating in later years. The claim is laid, first, upon the degrading posters of half naked women which plaster the walls of the city of Brooklyn; second, upon the employment of such plays as Camille and third, upon the fact that women of the Bernhardt stamp succeed in drawing immense houses, and securing immense fortunes upon the stage as it is to day.

There is not one of these arguments which may not be knocked out of the water at a single blow. If Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage were to go to theatres and study them as one should study everything which he proposes to analyze, he would doubtless be able to make a clearer and less easily answerable denunciation of the theatre and its belongings. Were it not for the fact that Hyde and Behman are the controllers of more than one theatre in Brooklyn, we should be inclined to doubt the Talmagean theory of the unusual preponderance of half naked women's pictures upon the billboards and dead walls of that city. If the condition is at all as it has been portrayed by Mr. Talmage, the city of Brooklyn must certainly be retrograding, as to the stage. It does not by any means follow that because one community in the universe demands shows of the naked stripes, the stage is falling away. It is the true theory of all commerce, good, bad, and indifferent, that the supply must be regulated by the demand. Under this condition it is quite clear that half naked women would not steadily flow into Brooklyn if there were not in Brooklyn a very decided desire for the bulk of the population to see them. We do not say that such a desire exists. We do not say that there is such a flow. We do not say that the dead wall and the bill-boards are covered with pictures of women unattired. We take Mr. Talmage's word for it. Perhaps we do an unsafe thing.

It is undoubtedly a fact that shows of the kind described by Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage exist. Many of them which circulate the flaring and debasing posters which he finds fault with, are controlled by Mr. Michael B. Leavitt, and men of his stripe. They are people who are not counted in any sense desirable by the reputable members of the dramatic calling. They are not widely respected or wanted. They exist, as do the less worthy members of all callings. Now and then we read of a minister of the gospel who indulges in unpleasant practices. Is Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage prepared to admit, on this ground, that the pulpit is going to the devil?

This Brooklyn parson, seething with sanctimony, is opposed to the modern play. He thinks they are full of libertinism, domestic intrigue, innuendoes, and marital scoundrelism. These are his phrases, not ours. The plays to which they refer, he thinks, indicate a great decadence of the drama since the days of Macready and the elder Booth. After making this sort of a statement Mr. Talmage proceeds to attack the Stoops to Conquer and the School for Scandal in the most violent terms. Both of these plays were acted in the days of Macready and the elder Booth. The last named of the two plays is certainly dirty and objectionable—more so than anything that is nowadays written. This does not, however, exactly prove that the drama is more vulgar at this time than it was at the period Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage speaks of, does it? Indeed, it is not better proof that the drama is better and purer now than it was at the time mentioned? As to the Stoops to Conquer, it is anything but an objectionable play. It is as clean and wholesome as the most innocent thing Mr. Talmage ever said, and the only difficulty in proving the statement lies in the infrequency of innocent sayings to Mr. Talmage's credit.

But this precious professional religionist thinks that while modern plays are full of marital scoundrelism, domestic intrigue, libertinism, and innuendoes, Shakespeare is all right. Indeed! Is there no "domestic intrigue" in Othello? Is there no "libertinism" in Much Ado About Nothing? Is not Iago a fair illustration of "marital scoundrelism"? Are there no innuendoes in any one of half a dozen of Shakespeare's plays? Shiel!

As to the modern play, it never fails to put a moral of Camille. Is there any woman who would be led into wrong by the offering and death of that unfortunate creature? If there be such women, they would sooner or later be led in any case.

The drama does not harm them. It does not hurry them. It holds them back. It is one of the sternest demands of theatrical managers that any play they produce must possess a healthy moral. It makes no difference how much villainy exists in a play, so it is presented in a proper light. The picture of crime unpunished and rewarded might rightly be deemed injurious to the public called upon to behold it. But sin is always whipped upon the stage. It is not always punished in real life. Therefore, by Talmagean reasoning, we reach the sage conclusion that real life is demoralizing.

The strongest of the charges brought against the drama by Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage bears upon the character of some of the women who play its heroines. That Mrs. Bernhardt is what she is, gives this sanctified athlete an opportunity to say the stage is vile, because it employs her as its mouth-piece. That there are other members of the profession who have been touched with the smirching fingers of scandal, he deems sufficient reason to conclude that the theatre is the gate-way to hell. We differ from Mr. T. De Wittless Talmage.

While the theatre is not the gate-way to hell, hell is sometimes the gate-way to the theatre.

It is not the fault of the theatre that Maude Granger, Helen Bancroft and Margaret Mather find their way into it, any more than it is the fault of the pulpit that Jerry McAuley, Ratsbaiter Burns, and "Bob" Hart find a welcome on the preacher's platform. Any thief, or ruffian, or dive keeper who wishes to make a pretence of newly acquired sanctity can ascend the pulpit stairs and be embraced and sniveled over by the righteous. He will go on in sweet prosperity just as long as he escapes being found out. Yet let a woman with a tainted name climb upon the stage, pretending that she is seeking her reformation there, and the whole profession of acting is hounded as her accomplice in secret sin. It is not needed to wait and see how she shall bear herself. It is enough to know she is on the stage. The "converted" thing is leading people up to heaven; the stained woman is leading them down to the other place if you let the holy clergyman tell it.

But let us admit that there are many unscrupulous women on the stage. Let us suppose that those who have been found out, combining with those who have not, roll up a large and sickening score. Where in this particular does the stage ily compare with other professions? What other calling, is subjected to the same test, can better hold its place? Let us see. There is a clergyman in the city of Brooklyn named Beecher. Against him some years ago, under the covering of his religion, he seduced the wife of his friend. There are many people who believe this charge to have been entirely true—a good many more, in fact, than there are who hold to Mr. Beecher's innocence. Over in Newark, a little while ago, a clergyman was "broken" for his alleged scoundrelly conduct with children. Not a week goes by that some minister of the gospel, under his smirking mask of holiness, is not shown under the magnifying glass of public opinion to be a seducer or a thief—all the more a villain by reason of his saintly pretence. Good. If we were to apply the arguments of T. De Wittless Talmage and his crew, we should roll our eyes heavenward, draw down our mouths and say the pulpit is the gateway to hell.

Out upon such falsifying! If the pulpit has not gone to the dogs through its Beechers, its child-seducers, and its numberless varieties, the stage has not been lowered by its Sarah Bernharts, its Maude Grangers, its Maggie Mathers, and its Helen Bancrofts. T. De Wittless Talmage knows this as well as anybody, and he is merely a shallow pated monger of words, never to be respectfully heard upon any subject, since he twists his arguments to apply to others, while he does not see that they touch himself. The stage has nothing to fear of what may be said about it by men like T. De Wittless Talmage. Such fellows cannot see the real points of weakness in the stage, and it will be only when some speaker shall come forward who knows the profession and its surroundings through and through, that we shall learn where lies the sore and how it may be cauterized. We hope that such a speaker may one day be found. He would be welcomed by the better interpreters of dramatic art, because, by placing the burden where it belongs, he would forever rid them of the stigma which is placed upon them by such false, blatant and ignorant fellows as T. De Wittless Talmage.—Byrnes Dramatic Times.

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