

The Golden Era
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On California Critics

Edwin Forrest is coming here. Very well—good bye, Mr. Forrest. Our critics will make you sing a lively tune. They will soon let you know that your great reputation cannot protect you on this coast. You have passed muster in New York, but they will show you up here. They will make it very warm for you. They will make you understand that a man who has served a lifetime as dramatic critic on a New York paper may still be incompetent, but that a California critic knows it all, notwithstanding he may have been in the shoemaking business most of his life, or a plow-artist on a ranch. You will be the sickest man in America before you get through with this trip. They will set up Frank Mayo for your model as soon as you get here, and they will say you don't play up to him, whether you do or not. And then they will decide that you are a "bilk." That is the grand climax of all criticism. They will say it here, first, and the country papers will endorse it afterwards. It will then be considered proven. You might as well as quit, then.

You see, they always go into ecstasies with an actor the first night he plays, and they call him the most gifted in America the next morning. Then they think they have not acted with metropolitan coolness and self possession, and they slew around on the other tack and abuse him like a pickpocket to get even. This was Bandman's experience, Menken's, Heron's, Vestali's, Boniface's, and many others I could name. It will be yours also. You had better stay where you are. You will regret it if you come here. How would you feel if they told you your playing might answer in places of small consequence but wouldn't do in San Francisco? They will tell you that, as sure as you live. And then say, in the most crushing way:

"Mr. Forrest has evidently mistaken the character of this people. We will charitably suppose that this is the case, at any rate. We make no inquiry as to what kind of people he has been in the habit of playing before, but we simply inform him that he is now in the midst of a refined and cultivated community, and one which will not tolerate such indelicate allusions as were made use of in the play of 'Othello' last night. If he would not play to empty benches, this must not be repeated." They always come the "refined and cultivated" dodge on a new actor—look out for it, Mr. Forrest, and do not let it floor you. The boys know enough that it is one of the most effective shots that can be fired at a stranger. Come on, Forrest—I will write your dramatic obituary, gratis.

(Source: *Twainquotes.com*, <http://www.twainquotes.com/Era/18660225a.html>)