

*Baltimore Evening Sun*  
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***“East Lynne” Wins***

*The 25 Most Popular Plays*

The New York *Dramatic Mirror*, of which Mrs. Fiske’s husband, Harrison Grey Fiske, is the editor, recently asked the actors of the United States to send in lists of the 25 plays which they had found to be most popular with American audiences and in response there came a great flood of letters. The lists therein have now been tabulated and the result is announced. It shows that, in the opinion of stage folk at least, Americans like “East Lynne” better than any other play, and that the drama which holds second place in their affections is “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The plays following these in popularity, according to the majority of the actors who voted are:

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 3. “Rip Van Winkle.”           | 14. “In Old Kentucky.”        |
| 4. “The Two Orphans.”          | 15. “The Silver King.”        |
| 5. “Monte Cristo.”             | 16. “The Lady of Lyons.”      |
| 6. “Camille.”                  | 17. “The School for Scandal.” |
| 7. “Ten Nights in a Barroom.”  | 18. “Peck’s Bad Boy.”         |
| 8. “The Old Homestead.”        | 19. “Jerry the Tramp.”        |
| 9. “Hazel Kirke.”              | 20. “The Christian.”          |
| 10. “Way Down East.”           | 21. “Charley’s Aunt.”         |
| 11. “Faust.”                   | 22. “The Octoroon.”           |
| 12. “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” | 23. “The Rivals.”             |
| 13. “The Ticket-of-Leave Man.” | 24. “Kathleen Mavourneen.”    |
|                                | 25. “Under Two Flags.”        |

It is probable that most students of the drama, as she flourishes in this fair republic, will agree that this list is exceedingly accurate. Every stock company manager knows, by experience, that “East Lynne,” which has first place, is an almost infallible life-saver in time of storm. Let it be but announced, and the plain people come flocking in, with their money and their tears. From the \$2 houses, of course, it has long since vanished, for the audiences which frequent such places have been corrupted and sophisticated by Ibsen and Pinero, and pathos makes them snicker, but in the village op’ry houses and the 50-cent theatres of the larger towns “East Lynne” still sets the tender-hearted proletariat to sniveling.

“Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” though it has well-nigh disappeared from the big cities, is still played week in and week out by companies which tour the bucolic sections. During the winter it is done in town halls and over livery stables; in the good old summer time it is given in tents. There are always 15 or 20 companies on the road, with full complements of bloodhounds and ice cakes.

The actors who play in these companies are set apart from all ordinary players. They devote their whole lives to "Uncle Tom" and are known to their brethren as "Tommers." "Tommers Wanted" is an advertising headline that often appears in the theatrical weeklies particularly in spring.

A "Tommer" must be a versatile man, for all "Tom" companies (as they are called) offer vaudeville between the acts, and many of them have brass bands to stir up the yeomanry, and in the variety interludes and band concerts the hard-worked "Tommers" must play. It is not uncommon, indeed to encounter an advertisement asking for a man to play Uncle Tom and the slide trombone, or for a woman to double Little Eva and the xylophone.

Some of these companies are quite pretentious. One, for example, announces that it carries two Uncle Toms, two Evas, two Marksies, two Simon Legrees and 12 bloodhounds. Another has a little Eva who is a skillful performer upon the slack wire, and she gives an exhibition of her art in the course of the last act, just before going to heaven.

Years ago a "Tom" company visited Baltimore in which Peter Jackson, the negropugilist now dead, was the Uncle Tom. Peter was an actor of considerable parts, and he gave a quite excellent performance. But between the second and third acts he stripped off his gray wig, laid aside his habiliments of servitude, donned green trunks and four-ounce gloves and boxed three graceful rounds with his sparring partner. The performance drew large crowds and Peter piled up the coin of legal tender.

#### *Four By Boucicault*

The *Mirror* calls attention to the fact that no less than four of the twenty-five plays upon its winning lists were written by that ingenious Irishman, Dion Boucicault. "Kathleen Mavourneen" and "The Octoroon" were entirely the products of his active fancy, but "Rip Van Winkle," of course, was a mere dramatization of Washington Irving's story (made for Joseph Jefferson after Jefferson had tried, without success, to make a version himself), and "Jerry the Tramp" was also borrowed from someone else. Boucicault's other great successes, "The Colleen Fawn" and "The Shaughran" came near winning places upon the list. The former, if the list were extended, would be No. 29, and the latter would be No. 50.

It is interesting to observe that, of the 25 winning plays, but two have any claim whatever to literary merit. These are Richard Brinsley Sheridan's pair of incomparable comedies, "The Rivals" and "The School for Scandal." Both have been delighting playgoers for more than 100 years and both show signs of remaining in favor for many years to come.

Joseph Jefferson, during his lifetime, monopolized "The Rivals" and the memory of his Bob Acres is still so green that no other actor ventures to tackle the part, but in the course of time, no doubt, it will begin to reappear in the repertoires of all ambitious comedians. "The School for Scandal" is played frequently by the stock companies, usually in a shortened and dephlogisticated form, and now and then it is "revived" by some New York manager. A few months ago it was given here by the New Theatre Company and as usual it drew a large house.

It would be interesting to trace the stage history of all of the 25 plays on the list. Most of them are of quite respectable antiquity. Even "Hazel Kirke" takes us back to the early eighties, and the "The Old Homestead" and "In Old Kentucky" will soon be old enough to vote.

#### *Sheridan's Comedies*

The oldest play of them all is “The Rivals,” which had its first performance at Covent Garden on January 17, 1775. It was a colossal failure, but Sheridan had faith in it and set about rewriting it. Eleven years later, after he had become manager of Covent Garden, he presented it again, and it made a great success. Ever since then it has been ranked among the very best of English comedies. There are few comedies, indeed, in any language, which equal it in interest and vivacity.

“The School for Scandal” was completed early in 1777, and Sheridan offered it to the London public on May 8 of that year. It pleased the town mightily and during the ensuing dozen years it was revived a dozen times.

“East Lynne,” which stands at the head of the list, is a dramatized novel, as are nine of the plays that follow it—“Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” “Rip Van Winkle,” “Monte Cristo,” “Camille,” “Ten Nights in a Barroom,” “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” “Peck’s Bad Boy,” “The Christian” and “Under Two Flags.”

“East Lynne” was written in 1861 by Ellen Price Wood, who is better known to fame as Mrs. Henry Wood. She was an Englishwoman, and for many years edited a popular magazine called the *Argosy*, in which “East Lynne” appeared serially. It was dramatized at once and leaped into immediate popularity. Mrs. Wood wrote about 40 novels in all. She died in 1887.

#### *The Author of “The Two Orphans”*

“The Two Orphans” is a translation of “Les Deux Orphelines,” by Adolphe Philippe D’Ennery, a French dramatic hack of the Empire. D’Ennery was skilled at all sorts of playmaking. He wrote burlesques, comic opera librettos, melodramas, tragedies, farces and vaudevilles. “Les Deux Orphelines” was first presented in Paris in 1873, and an English version was made in the course of the year following. This last made the fame of Kate Claxton, an actress now well-nigh forgotten. Clara Morris and other sobbing stars of the eighties also appeared in the piece. It is done by the 50-cent stock companies today almost as often as “East Lynne.”

*(Source: Iowa State University, Parks Media Center, Microfilm Collection)*