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## *"The Winter's Tale"*

Shakespeare at his worst was made human and engrossing at the Auditorium last night by the excellent acting and more particularly, by what may be called, in a baseball term, the perfect team-work of the New Theatre Company of New York.

Saving only "Cymbeline," no play of the master dramatist has less verity in it and more clap-trap than "The Winter's Tale." At almost every point in the action, in truth, the posture of events is incredible, and not only incredible, but also downright disagreeable: but, despite all that—and a hot, sticky evening, to boot—the company achieved a success which must needs give renewed confidence in the principles upon which it was founded. It was a success, not of a few individuals, but of a harmonious, capable and extremely well-directed company; not of a star, or of scenery, or of press agents, but of intelligent actors and artistic acting.

Why the plays of Shakespeare's later years, of which "The Winter's Tale" is one , are so sadly lacking in the stupendous merits of their forerunners is a problem with which scholars have been wrestling in vain for many weary moons. Along about 1610 or 1611, if the meagre information in our possession is reliable, the poet left London and his great successes and retired to his old home at Stratford. He was by that time, a man of wealth and reputation, the first dramatist of the time and one of the richest theatrical managers. He had in brief ease and leisure, and he was in the prime of his manhood, and so it was not unreasonable to expect him to write a series of masterpieces which should make even "Othello" and "Hamlet" pale. But he did nothing of the sort. Instead, he wrote "Coriolanus" "Cymbeline," "The Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest," of which only the last was at all worthy of his genius.

### *The Poet's Decline*

Why? The answer, in truth, eludes us, and we may only guess. Some hold that Shakespeare, in those last five years of his life, was in declining health and gloomy spirits: that domestic difficulties beset him and he missed the stimulating companionship of his old associates. Others maintain that the plays credited to that period were not written by the poet at all, but by lesser hacks of the Bankside, though, perhaps, with his aid.

Yet others, led by Professor Baker, of Harvard, hold that Shakespeare's decline was but natural: that every dramatist's career may be divided into three periods, of which the first shows inspiration minus technique, the second a perfect welding of the two, and the third, technique minus inspiration, Professor Baker summons Ibsen and Pinero into court to prove his theory, but they are far from satisfactory exhibits, for the Ibsen of "When We Dead Awaken" was plainly a doddering and senile ancient, while the Shakespeare of "The Winter's Tale" was a man still in the 40s, and of Pinero it may be said, without absurdity, that his latest plays, far from showing a decline, are probably among the best he has ever given us.

But, after all, there may be a good deal of truth in Professor Baker's theory. By 1611, perhaps, Shakespeare had begun to acquire a considerable conceit of himself.

Enormously successful in his wars upon the Greek unities, and the other ancient conventions of the theatre, it is possible that he yearned to give amazing exhibitions of his sheer virtuosity, that he desired to prove to the world that he could make any conceivable situation poignant, and any conceivable character dramatic.

There is ground for this notion of careful craftsmanship in "The Winter's Tale," The dialogue shows a good deal of polishing: it lacks entirely the prodigal gorgeousness visible in the earlier plays. There is no piling up of words in the lavish style so notable in "Romeo and Juliet" and "Hamlet"; there is none of that daring adventuring into the interstellar spaces of speech which gives some of the other plays their overpowering color.

"The Winter's Tale," in brief, is a play written in the study, by a man grown somewhat self-conscious and introspective; and so it lacks the romantic throb of its predecessors. It is splendid, but it is seldom poetry: it is ingenious, but it is never moving drama.

### *The Work of The Company*

Out of this rather discouraging material, the New Theatre Company makes an entertainment of constant delights. We have had plenty of good Shakespearean performances in late years—the Sothern and Marlowe "Much Ado About Nothing," the Mantell "King Lear" and the Forbes-Robertson "Hamlet," for example—but in none has there been a more harmonious pooling of effort, a better presentation of small parts as well as great, a more satisfactory general effect.

Since Mary Anderson's day it has been customary to have the two parts of Hermione and Perdita, mother and daughter, played by the same actress, but in the present performance they are separated, and, with a considerable gain in reality. The Hermione is Edith Wynne Matthison, an English actress of the first rank, whose splendid work in "Everyman" first introduced her to American theatre-goers. Miss Matthison, in voice and looks, often suggests Julia Marlowe, but there are considerable differences between them, and often those differences are to Miss Matthison's advantage. She has grace, beauty and intelligence: She gets pathos into the picture of the slandered and suffering queen without visible actorial effort: her elocution soothes the ear like 18th century music.

The Perdita of Leah Bateman-Hunter is no less charming, though here the charm is chiefly that of youthful beauty. The long love scene between Perdita and Florizel, with the throng of merry makers roaring all about, and the disguised King of Bohemia and Camille, the faithful lord, lurking in the background, is enacted with rare poetical feeling, and in the last scene of all, to which Perdita is restored in the present version of the play, Miss Bateman-Hunter makes a picture that will linger long in memory. Pauline, the doughty champion of the luckless Queen, is enacted with all the vivacity we have come to look for in Rose Coghian. Like Miss Matthison. Miss Coghian makes music of the English language.

### *Henry Kolker As The King*

The King of Sicilia is played by Henry Kolker, an actor whose great success in "Monna Vanna" will be remembered. It is a performance full of lights and shadows—a performance made vivid with little touches. The rising jealousy of the King, his savage denunciation of the Queen, and toward the end, his bitter remorse—all of these things are depicted with poignancy and authority. The other men, almost without exception, live up to Mr. Kolker's example. E. M. Holland, as the old shepherd; Ferdinand Gottschalk, as the clown; Albert Bruning as Autolyeus that delightful scoundrel; and Henry Stanford as Florizel all serve with conspicuous skill their parts.

Even the small roles, which are ordinarily consigned to bad actors of the Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern kidney, are here played artistically and with a due appreciation of their importance to the general picture. The First Lord of Jacob Wendell Jr., for example, is done extremely well. Mr. Wendell is a recent recruit from the amateur ranks, but there is certainly nothing amateurish about his acting. In the same way the small part of Mopsa is given importance and interest by the skill of Jessie Busley.

The play is presented with stage settings which well represent the scenery and furnishings of the Shakespearean stage. Those tedious bores who travel about the country giving the plays of the great poet "in the Elizabethan manner" commonly seek to convince us that the stage of the old Globe Theatre resembled as hangman's scaffold. As a matter of fact, the Shakespearean stage boasted not only elaborate hangings and properties, but also actual scenery, and this scenery is shown in the present performance.

The costuming is also in the Elizabethan manner. That is to say, it is the costuming of the early 17th century, and not of the real period of the play. It was not until after Garrick's time that such anachronisms were abandoned. In the day of Shakespeare, it is probable that even Julius Caesar wore doublet and hose, and even Cleopatra the ruff of the Elizabethan great ladies.

Incidentally, the present performance gives the quietus to another ancient error regarding the stage of Shakespeare—that is to say, the notion that the names of places were indicated by signs. Such signs, it is true, were common enough when plays were given at court, where there was no scenery, but at the Bankside theatres, at least after 1600, there was always some attempt to indicate the locale in a less childish manner.