

THERE was a certain pleasant solemnity about the opening night of this theatre last night. The present writer had not seen it before, and on the whole admired it; it was not flagrantly different from other theatres, but it was in good taste, on the whole, and it

had an air. On taking one's seat, a curtain somewhat suggestive of a prison wall fell coldly on the senses, but then Mr. Toole came in and was cheered, and Mr. Chamberlain came in and was cheered, and Royalty confirmed one's self-respect, and annoyance at the difference between the advertised time of the rising of the said curtain and the actual time (which would have allowed one to dine at a more reasonable hour) disappeared. And then another curtain met one's eye, a clever imitation of the Gobelins Dido tapestry, and anon Mrs. Tree appeared before it and recited a composition of the Poet Laureate. Of this an inaccurate

recollection forbids criticism: it seemed to have something of an agreeable, old-fashioned manner, and Mrs. Tree recited it extremely well. The National Anthem followed, and gave us a feeling of patriotism and a pleasant change of posture. And then the play, Mr. Gilbert Parker's "Seats of the Mighty." We had best say at once we were disappointed in it, for we expected much and were well-disposed. Mr. Parker is a taking writer of romantic narrative; he is not, so far as this play shows him, an effective dramatist; and, after all, to be good at one thing is to be more than most people. It seemed to us essentially a dramatized novel, a play which depended for its interest on knowledge of the novel. We question if those to whom the book was unknown followed the plot with complete understanding; and to us, who knew it, the attraction of the book was absent. That attraction was

that being a tale of mere adventure in its scheme it had yet an interest of character. The character of Doltaire, the King's bastard, unscrupulous, charming, shrewd, and dare-devil, "a devil with something of the angel yet undefaced in him," was expressed in the book; it was only indicated in the play. The character of Alixe, self-contained, resolute, lovable, was expressed in the book; it was less than indicated in the play, where Alixe betrayed her feelings and her purpose at every turn, and showed nothing of the strength and perplexity of either. The book had a progressive movement; the play had not; there was an unprogressive stream of talk punctuated with explosions. As a play, the best that can be said for it is that its "curtains" were well timed and effective, with the effect of melodrama. The dialogue was not conspicuously good; at a point in the second act it was excellent, but otherwise it was neither realistic nor brilliant. And every now and then Mr. Parker tried us with too familiar phrases—"To be



MRS. BEERBOHM TREE AS MADAME COURNAL.

acquainted with me is a liberal education," "I am on the side of the angels," and the like—which he had really no right to use. Our criticism may seem harsh; if so, Mr. Parker must take it as a compliment. We looked for something better than the ordinary play, and are inclined to apply a severer standard. The prologue consisted mainly of a prophecy by Doltaire of the Revolution—"tumbrels" and all complete—which in 1758 was not "convincing," and

was hardly in tone with the character. The first act concluded effectively with the captive Englishman's being put against a wall to be shot, and being let off; the second concluded effectively with his escape, and the third with the explosion in which Doltaire was killed. In both these latter acts the action is jerky. For example, in the second act Doltaire announced a plot by which, when everybody was drunk, the English captive was to be killed in a duel by him: in about ten minutes afterwards everybody was drunk, and the duel was in progress. Again, in the third act, Doltaire was devising plans for keeping the English out of Quebec, about ten minutes before they were all over the city. But we must not quibble for ever. "The Seats of the Mighty," if not a good play of a high order, is a fairly attractive one of a mediocre order: let it pass.

Where Mr. Parker has shown real skill is in giving Mr. Tree a good part. His speech in the prologue, though not in itself a very likely one to be made in such surroundings, was very well suited to his manner. His scene before the final explosion was exigent of all his powers, and he rose to the occasion. And the most charmingly dramatic scene in the play, where Madame Cournal exhorts him to a path of ambition in her society, was good for both actor and actress. We have never seen Mrs. Tree in a part which, to our mind, gave a complete chance to her histrionic powers. This of Madame Cournal was not so bad, and the scene which we have mentioned as the most



MR. BEERBOHM TREE AS DOLTAIRE.



MISS KATE RORKE AS ALIXE DUVARNEY, AND MR. LEWIS WALLER AS CAPTAIN MORAY.

dramatic of the play was essentially the success of the piece. She had few other chances, but she made the very most of them, always with a duly artistic sense of perspective. She expressed a Frenchwoman, and a Frenchwoman of wit and breeding and facile senses, which we suppose was the author's intention. We will take the others in their order on the programme. Mr. Brookfield's part of the Louis XV. was slight; we think he did the most with it, bearing himself (as has not been always the case with stage kings) as a man of breeding and the habit of authority, if a weak and foolish one. Mr. Lewis Waller, as the captive Captain Moray, was as firm and manly as could be desired. Mr. Murray Carson was spirited as the wicked Governor. Mr. Lionel Brough had a very small chance as a sergeant, the half of the comic relief; he was amusing, but did not seem to like saying "Oho!" Mr. Mollison was not bad as the barber, whose hatred of the Governor (we hope you gather the plot as we go on) produces the catastrophe, and Mr. Charles Allan was dignified as the father of the love of the captive captain. Miss Janette Steer had little to do as the Pompadour, and made little of what she had. And now we come to Miss Kate Rorke, who played the heroine, Alixe Duvarney: she was duly affectionate, and had an opportunity (which she took) of a little acting when she mocked the wicked Doltaire after the captain's escape. The play was extremely well staged, except for the altar in the "Chapel of Refuge" in the last act. It was an interesting evening, but we hope to see the new theatre and Mr. Gilbert Parker concerned in a better play. Mr. Tree made a short and appropriate speech at the end.