

"THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY."

a Drama, in a Prologue and Three Acts, by Gilbert Parker, Produced at Her Majesty's Theatre on Wednesday, April 25th, 1897.

Louis XV.	Mr CHARLES BROOKFIELD
Tinoir Doltaire	Mr TREE
Captain Moray	Mr LEWIS WALLER
M. François Bigot	Mr MURRAY CARSON
Sergeant Gabord	Mr LIONEL BROUGH
Voban	Mr WILLIAM MOLLISON
The Seigneur Duvarney	Mr CHAS. ALLAN
N. Vendome	Mr HENRY ARNCLIFFE
Comte de Chauvelin	Mr GAYER MACKAY
Colonel Lancy	Mr H. W. VARNA
Lieut. Ferney	Mr ARTHUR HOLMES-GORE
The Prince Soubise	Mr GERALD DU MAURIER
The Bishop of Orleans	Mr COOKSON
The Bishop of Quebec	Mr D. J. WILLIAMS
Renard	Mr ARTHUR COE
Corporal Larouk	Mr F. PERCIVAL STEVENS
Mr Wainfleet	Mr F. MACVICARS
The Marquise de Pompadour	Mr BERTIE THOMAS
Madame Cournal	Miss JANETTE STEER
Mathilde	Mrs TREE
Babette	Miss EDITH OSTLER
Mdlle. Alixe Duvarney	Miss WINIFRED LEON
	Miss KATE RORKE

Mr Boehholm Tree may well have remarked, as he did in his speech after the production of *The Seats of the Mighty* in his new theatre, on Wednesday, that it was a day of some importance in his life. The opening of the new Her Majesty's has been so well heralded, Mr Tree's personal following is so large and enthusiastic, and his return from America has been so eagerly awaited by his admirers, that the occasion on Wednesday evening was a momentous one. One of the most brilliant audiences that ever graced a first night assembled within the walls of the new Her Majesty's, and regaled the time before the rising of the curtain by admiring the interior of the house. In another part of this paper we print an architect's description of the theatre; but such an enumeration of technical detail will convey little meaning to most of our readers. Broadly and simply, then, we may say that the first impression, that made by the spacious vestibule, with its creamy-brown walls and solid, scarlet-liveried footmen, is very agreeable. There is plenty of room here for Mr Tree's patrons to pause and wait, and the access to the different parts of the house is easy and convenient. Ascending to the dress-circle we find ourselves separated by a transparent glass screen from a spacious foyer. The *coup d'œil* from the dress-circle is dazzling—almost too much so—and Mr Tree will probably find it advisable to soften the too-intense radiance of the electric candles around the front of the tiers. The scheme of decoration is not completed until the iron curtain has risen and the act-drap has been exposed to view. Then it is seen that the rich crimson hangings of the proscenium, the brown-speckled marble border, and the fluted columns are intended to frame one of the finest curtains in London, an enlarged version of a piece of Gobelin's tapestry originally made by Coppel for the Regent d'Orleans, in which Dido is represented as receiving Æneas and his companions. The curtain, by its old-fashioned simplicity and largeness of treatment, dominates the view, the eye taking in subordinately the massive gilt balustrade separating the sunken orchestra from the stalls, the creamy tones of the body of the house, and the steep rake of the dress circle, which projects far over the pit. The superb Louis Quatorze chandelier is too elevated and out of the way to be properly appreciated except by the occupants of the gallery, but the beautiful brackets in the same style around the boxes can be easily admired. To sum up, Mr Tree has entered on the possession of a roomy, comfortable, and very handsome playhouse, which is capable of containing a large audience.

So important an erection could not, of course, be opened without due pomp and ceremony. From between the two rich hanging curtains emerged Mrs Tree, charmingly attired in Watteau costume, and recited the following inaugural address, specially written for the occasion by the Poet Laureate:—

"Very well met, and welcome!"
 Leaving life's load of dulness at the door,
 You come to dwell in Fairyland once more.
 Puck, Ariel, Pegasus, imp, fairy, sprite,
 All that can lend illusion and delight,
 Quick to come forth and frolic as you bid,
 Behind that curtain cunningly are hid.
 We have the Muses nine, the Graces three,
 And all the Pass-ones—under lock and key.
 Which would you summon? Laughter, terror, tears?
 Call each in turn, and promptly it appears.
 Magical melody! Kings upon their throne,
 And Queens—though never one to match our own;
 Bewild'ring innocence, taxed with every crime,
 And heroes entering in the nick of time;
 Love soaring rank, wealth, ease, for Beauty's sake,
 And Pity sobbing till its heart must break;
 Villains triumphant till the final act,
 Wit, pathos, humour, everything, in fact,
 Romantic, generous, fanciful, ideal:
 Romance is only the diviner real.
 Away, the worldling's mock, the cynic's sneer,
 Imagination holds dominion here,
 Whose radiance draws mean mists of lower air
 To its own heights, to dissipate them there.
 With life ill-pleased, you come not here to see
 Man as he is, but as you'd have him be,
 Tender, yet strong, at infamy aghast,
 And woman fond and faithful to the last:
 Angels that guard, and Furies that requite,
 A heavenly world where everything's put right.
 Should falsehood triumph, still the stage must strive
 To keep man's faith in nobleness alive,
 Make him to beseer things a little blind,
 And wish wise hopefulness console mankind.
 For this we put on motley to the view,
 And travesty ourselves, to comfort you.
 Yet there is One, whose venerated name
 We humbly borrow, and will never shame,
 Who needs no tinsel trappings nor disguise
 To shine a Monarch in the whole world's eyes,
 Waits for no prompter for the timely word,
 And, when 'tis uttered, everywhere is heard;
 Plays, through sheer goodness, a commanding part,
 Speaks from the soul, and acts but from the heart.
 Long may she linger, loved, upon the scene,
 And long resound the prayer, "God Save our Gracious Queen!"

The curtains were then drawn up, and the stage was seen to be filled with members of the Queen's Hall Choral Society. Miss Clara Butt sang the National Anthem, which was chorused by the ladies and gentlemen on the stage, the audience, of course, standing. The following "topical" verse, an unpublished fragment of Longfellow, was added:—

Lord, let war's tempests cease,
 Fold the whole world in peace
 Under Thy wings.
 Make all the nations one,
 All hearts beneath the sun,
 Till Thou shalt reign alone
 Great King of Kings!

When this was over the audience was in a proper frame of mind to receive impressions from Mr Gilbert Parker's play, *The Seats of the Mighty*.

Its performance was an instance of how far the inherent defects of a drama may be atoned for, masked, and partially remedied by fine acting and elaborate mounting. *The Seats of the Mighty*, whatever it may have been as a novel, will not hold water as a play. That the hero, Tinoir Doltaire, is an imperfect character would matter little. The worst of it is that his imperfections are such irritating ones. One knows not how to take him. In the first act he denounces the luxury and selfishness of the aristocracy, and proclaims the Revolution with all the earnestness of a Mirabeau the Elder; but subsequently he does not even attempt to live up to his sermon. His coldly-plotted judicial murder of a rival is not redeemed by any virile aim or earnest ambition, and his love is a mixture of animalism and frivolity. With such a leading personage the pivot of any piece would be loosened. What, then, saved the performance on Wednesday? First, the fine acting, beautiful dressing, and magnificent mounting, which charmed ear and eye; next, the admirable acting; and last, the Dumas-like fertility of incident. The stage movement does not often flag; there is always something being done, though—as in the case of the burning of the granaries, which gave full scope for the employment of the air-pumping machinery—that something may not much help forward the main action. Witness the story:—In the prologue we are at Versailles. Madame De Pompadour has been intriguing

to sell Canada to the English, and a compromising letter of hers has fallen into the hands of Captain Moray, a British officer, now a prisoner in the hands of the French. The Pompadour dispatches Tinoir Doltaire, an illegitimate son of the King's, to Quebec, to obtain the dangerous document. Doltaire has been smitten by the simple charms of Mdlle. Alixe Duvarney, and accepts the mission in order to meet her at the house of her uncle, François Bigot, the Governor of Quebec. Now this Governor has seduced the betrothed of one Voban, a barber, who awaits an opportunity for revenge. Moray, who is betrothed to Alixe, refuses to give up the letter; and Doltaire is about to have him shot when Alixe, awed by her lover's extremity, promises to procure the epistle. This compliance, however, only gains time, for Moray is tried as a spy, thumb-screwed, and condemned to be hung. Doltaire, who has piqued the celebrated dancer Madame Cournal by rejecting her advances, is seized with the freak of taking Moray out of prison and fighting a duel with him; and to prevent this Madame Cournal and Alixe arrange that the former shall fly to the camp and bring back Bigot to stop the duel, whilst the latter, disguised as Madame Cournal, diverts the attention of the French officers with a Spanish dance. The result is that the Governor returns in the nick of time to prevent Doltaire killing the Englishman, who escapes in the confusion of the moment, and gets across the St. Lawrence to the English army. Voban—whose name suggests siege operations—has mined the treasury-chamber in Bigot's palace, with a view to blowing himself and the Governor up together. Unluckily for Doltaire, he happens to be the occupant of the room when the barber enters and, after locking the door, flings the key out of the window. Too late, Voban realises that he will be blowing up the wrong man. The explosion takes place, he and Doltaire are killed, and the English troops march in over the débris.

As we have indicated, Mr Tree had much to contend against in the part of Doltaire, and nothing but his consummate histrionic skill, his eloquent delivery, his powerful declamation, and his expressive and varied characterisation could have prevented the character from being distasteful. The "fat" of the piece fell to Mr Lewis Waller, who, of course, had the audience with him all the time as the sturdy, unflinching Englishman, Captain Moray. Doubtless, in a book, it would have been possible to palliate Doltaire's faults by explanatory subtlety and fine psychology; but, as a dramatic personage, Doltaire offers a difficult task to his impersonator; and it speaks volumes for his courage and unselfishness that Mr Tree should have taken on himself so unthankful and difficult a task. Mr Charles Brookfield was duly senile and dignified as Louis XV., and Mr Murray Carson gave a depiction of the Governor Bigot which was powerful and picturesque throughout. A capital bit of character acting was done by Mr Lionel Brough as Sergeant Gabord, a rough, blunt soldier. Though the part was brief, Mr Brough made a very favourable impression in it. Mr William Mollison gave ghastly emphasis to his reading of the rôle of Voban, and depicted the venetial mania of the barber with keen intensity. Miss Janette Steer realised well the polished hardness of the Pompadour; and Mrs Tree, besides being velvety and graceful throughout, startled even her warmest admirers by the fervour and vigour of her acting in the scene in which the overtures of the Cournal are rejected by Doltaire. Miss Kate Rorke enacted Alixe Duvarney with her usual sweetness and power, doing full justice to the emotional passages of the part, which was well within the accomplished actress's scope. Very commendable was the finished manner in which the smaller rôles were sustained, each being a little study in itself. This description applies equally to the Seigneur Duvarney of Mr Charles Allan, the Colonel Lancy of Mr Arthur Holmes-Gore, the Prince Soubise of Mr Cookson, the Bishops of Mr D. J. Williams and Mr Arthur Coe, and the English Chaplain of Mr Bertie Thomas. Miss Winifred Leon made a sprightly Babette; and the lords, ladies, and others of the cast were all creditably represented. The mounting was marvellously artistic and sumptuous, Mr Walter Hann's courtyard of the Governor's palace, with its realistic snow and masonry, being particularly effective, and Mr Walter Johnstone's panelled salon for the second act being remarkably rich and elaborate. To the same artist must be allotted credit for the surprising explosion in the last act, when the Treasury Chamber is converted in an instant into a smoking ruin. The artists were summoned at the close of the performance, and then Mr Tree, appearing alone, added a few words of thanks. He said this was an important moment in his little life; and after offering his thanks to the architect, Mr C. J. Phipps, for the plans, and to Mr H. Romaine Walker for the decorations of the theatre, Mr Tree expressed his satisfaction that he possessed the friendship and support of the playgoing public. A special call afterwards brought out Mr Lewis Waller, who was cordially applauded. The author, on his introduction by Mr Tree, had a mixed reception.