

**TO-DAY IN AMERICA:
STUDIES FOR THE OLD
WORLD AND THE NEW. IN
TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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JOSEPH HATTON

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BY

JOSEPH HATTON.

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TO-DAY IN AMERICA.

I.

THE STAGE.

English and American audiences—First Night of a New Piece—Playgoing made Easy—Mr. Edwin Booth and other Eminent Actors—Miss Clara Morris—French, English, and American Art—The late Mr. Sothorn's Last Reception in London—A Tragic Ballad—The late Mr. Henry J. Montague—The Englishman Abroad—"Wanted a Dramatist"—The Author of "Home Sweet Home"—American Dramatists—Lack of Earnestness in Modern Playrights—London Society and the French Stage.

I.

American audiences differ greatly from English audiences. They are more unsophisticated. They often appeared to me to be more easily pleased. They certainly behave better. They are more respectful to the actors. However bad the play they never hiss. There is no pit in an American house. The entire floor, from the entrance to the orchestra, is occupied by what in England would be a stall audience. There is no "gallery," and there are no "gods." The house is not "dressed" from an English point of view; that is, there are no feminine chests exposed to draughts and opera-

glasses, no men in swallow-tailed coats and white ties. An English audience, therefore, looks more imposing, but not more comfortable. The American audience at night is dressed something after the manner of the English at a morning performance. It is well dressed in all parts of the theatre; the people in the upper seats wear clothes as good as those in the lower, and behave as well. On the first night of a new piece there are no running comments on the play. If the spectators do not like the play, they do not go to see it any more; if it is particularly bad they leave before the last act. But they make no noisy protests. Joining issue with the managerial judgment, they are dignified and quiet. The success or failure of a play is not left long in doubt; though, from the general and national habit of going to the theatre, a failure at some houses will yield almost as much money as a so-called success at some of the London theatres.

First-night audiences in New York are very odd: it is as if they were actuated now and then by the spirit and impulse of one man. I went to the first night of a comedy. Everybody knew the play was a failure, yet everybody on this occasion stayed to the last, and called for a speech from the author. The curtain went up on all the company. The artists were applauded, the author made a speech. The audience, with a broad genial smile on its face—the smile as of one person—clapped its hands

and went out afterwards, never to return. On the next night the theatre was empty. There is often a singular unanimity in the actions of an American crowd.

The theatre being a national amusement, playhouses are made easy of access. Evening dress not a necessity, gentlemen "down town" (in the city) can meet their wives at a restaurant, dine, and walk into the playhouse afterwards, without any fuss. Thousands of persons go to the theatre by tram-car. It is not necessary to make a serious fixture of an engagement to go to the theatre. You can go on the shortest notice—drop in on your way home. If the play you wish to see is a very great success, there are speculators who buy up good seats, and you can be sure of getting what you require for a small premium from these persons in the neighbourhood of the entrance. Despite her popularity and the large sums of money she drew, there were "choice seats" to be had in this way even to see Mademoiselle Bernhardt. The moment you enter an American theatre with your numbered ticket you are free of the house. There are programmes lying in trays at the door. You pick one up as you go in. Nobody bores you for your cloak or hat. You are not worried for fees of any kind. Refreshment vendors are not continually at your elbow. You have come to see the play, not to be annoyed by licensed plunderers who have bought from the manager the right to tax your patience and your pocket.