

THE JUGGLES OF "JUDAH."

Hunting for an Idea in a Play with Psychological Pretensions Presented at Palmer's.

LIARS AS HEROES.

Some Sins and Blunders of a Romantic Minister and a Welsh Fasting Girl.

GOOD COMEDY SPOILED.

Mr. Willard as the Rev. Judah Llewellyn—Mystic and Agnostic—Vashti and Her Father—A Gap in the Play—"The Babes in the Wood" at Niblo's—Spectacular Pantomime—"Poor Jonathan" in German—At Harrigan's.

"Judah" is not "a play with an idea." The author, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, may have had one when he began his play. I think he had. You may still see the ghost of an idea in the second and third acts of "Judah."

But, somehow, toward the end of his task the idea was lost, or, possibly, thrown overboard, in deference to the great British public, which, Professor Jopp holds, "should be locked up" like Vashti Dethic.

Without it, "Judah" is neither a very significant nor a very valuable contribution to the literature of the stage.

Mr. Jones appears to me to have a good deal in common with Professor Janus, alias Dethic. He is a bit of a juggler. He "makes plum puddings in other men's hats."

He is great at sleight of hand. He can persuade you that the water you are drinking is wine or whiskey or vitriol.

A turn of his hand, and you fancy he has a gold mine up his sleeve.

Hey! Presto! He makes a few quick passes and you are ready to swear that "Judah" is a psychological revelation.

His "Judah" trick has been rather successful—abroad. I doubt whether it will take as well on Broadway. A controversy, to be sure, is some-

times useful to a play. And "Judah" has already stirred up a controversy. But we tire of arguments more quickly here than they do in London. Talk alone will not save a poor play.

The New York public is learning to think for itself. You cannot force an opinion down its throat. You may take it in once or twice, but after that it rebels. All the fine language in the dictionary weighs less with it than one grain of solid common sense.

On the night of the first performance of "Judah" at Palmer's Theatre the public was surprised rather than satisfied. It had been told that the play was "witty" and "powerful" and "original." It had considerable respect for Mr. Jones and Mr. Palmer, and it admired Mr. Willard.

Little enthusiasm was aroused by the Rev. Judah Llewellyn at least nobody in the theatre protested.

But on Thursday, when I saw the play for the second time, I noticed a change in the audience. At the close of the second act, when the clergyman had perjured himself, the applause was checked by hisses.

This is a healthy sign. It may not bode good to "Judah," to be sure; but it is full of hope for the future of our stage.

If I were a manager (thank Heaven I am not), far from discouraging comments of this kind, I would encourage them. Hisses are, as a rule, a more honest and more useful clue to the real feeling of an audience than applause.

A clever comedy of English manners has been spoiled in "Judah." With what Mr. Howells might term "a profound misconception of his office," Mr. Jones has transformed a Gilbertian satire on the "fads" of British society into an unreal and singularly unconvincing drama.

He has aimed high, indeed. But he has lacked the strength to work out his purpose. The result

of his weakness is a play which contains one neither dramatically nor logically.

The comic in "Judah" is infinitely more interesting than the pathetic, though whether the point of those scenes between the Pralls and the Jopps will be apparent to Americans as to Englishmen may be doubted.

Jaxon Prall, the positivist. But, in spite of some exaggeration, he has succeeded in satirizing a number of types familiar to Londoners—types which deserve to be ridiculed.

I will also cheerfully concede that, on the whole, "Judah" is well written. The dialogue is rather too flowery at times, but as a rule it is terse and telling. Except when Mr. Dethic is on the stage, too, "Judah" is not a libel on society. The men and women in the piece speak good English. They seem well bred. They rarely commit the blunders which mar so many of our own "society" plays.

But it is not on its humor or refinement that "Judah" rests its claims.

It is supposed to be "a play with an idea." Mr. Jones would not consent to have his work admitted on less lofty grounds. Let us see what he has to say for himself.

At the opening of "Judah" we find ourselves in the drawing room of Asgarby Castle, in Wales. It is a very curious drawing room, adorned with garish tapestry (or frascos), which, one might have supposed, would have been rather distressing to its noble owner.

Lord Asgarby and his friend, an agnostic professor named Jopp, discuss the health of Lady Eve, the last of her race, who is fading, a victim of consumption.

We are soon introduced to a young minister, the Rev. Judah Llewellyn, who, it seems, is half Jew, half Welsh and wholly mystic. We learn that he habitually "hears voices" in the air, and, from the Mayor of Beauchampton, who has called on Lord Asgarby to protest against Judah's sermons, we gather that he has been making himself somewhat ridiculous by preaching a crusade on behalf of a girl called Vashti Dethic, who has been working miracles in his parish. As he is evidently in love with the young lady, however, we excuse his fervor, regretting that he should have formed his conclusions so hastily.

The doctors have doomed Lady Eve. She knows it. But the arrival of Vashti gives her hope, she clutches at the bare chance of being cured, and, despite the shrugs of Professor Jopp, her father invites the girl to the castle with Mr. Dethic, promising that he will give her anything, even to the half of his fortune, if she succeeds in curing his daughter.

Professor Jopp and the Rev. Judah Llewellyn form a striking contrast as they stand in the room discussing the reported miracles. On the one hand a dry, quaint, quizzical, elderly scottie; on the other, a young minister, ardent, eager and credulous.

"How do you manage to be so eloquent?" asks the Professor.

"I believe in what I preach," replies Judah. "So do I. But that can't be the only reason," observes the Professor.

"What was the subject of your last lecture?" asks the minister.

"Earthworms and tadpoles," says Jopp. "Mine was the unseen world!" exclaims the minister.

"Ah, I can't follow you there," says Jopp. "There is a great deal of humorous observation in this episode and some of the lines are even witty. Jopp remarks—

"We do not deny miracles nowadays. We explain them, or, perhaps the brightest speech in the play, he says, now, though.

Vashti is led in, fainting. She has just worked another cure. Her father, an evident charlatan, informs us that his daughter invariably suffers after these manifestations.

"She will recover more quickly if you will leave her alone," says Dethic. They leave her, and without so much as taking the precaution to close the doors Dethic exclaims—

"Capital, my dear. You couldn't have done it better."

So at the outset we see that Vashti is not only the instrument but the accomplice of her parent in the frauds which have been perpetrated. The girl revolts against them, but she consents.

All else being so far fetched in the story it does not greatly amaze us to find that Vashti claims exceptional physical as well as spiritual powers. To deepen the belief of her dupes she has announced that she can fast indefinitely. In fact a fast is a necessary prelude to her miracles. She will have to go without food for three weeks before attempting to cure Lady Eve, who—poor, gentle, little lady—is convinced of her new friend's powers and vows she feels better already.

"Will you subject yourself to my test?" says Professor Jopp, who scoffs at Vashti's power.

Vashti agrees to the ordeal, and as the curtain falls her adorer, the minister, rebukes the agnostic's incredulity.

Thus far the play has dragged a bit. But it has been rather interesting and clever. The author has introduced his various characters skillfully and naturally.

What will he do with them?

For the second time the curtain rises—on the exterior of a ruined tower in Lord Asgarby's park. It is evening and summer. Lord Asgarby and his guests have dined and are taking coffee somewhere in the house. From time to time you catch the distant sounds of a violin and piano. Behind the scenes they are playing "Adelaida." From out the bushes which fringe the edge of an old wall Judah emerges.

all, and not at all the saint we had supposed him, he melta.

"You are very beautiful to-night," he murmurs, clasping her to his arms.

Five minutes or more have been spent on this scene. Our sweethearts have forgotten all about the Professor, when Dethic ostentatiously unlocks an inner door and the alarm is given. Judah hasties into the conservatory (L). Jopp and his daughter enter from the back and proceed to hide themselves inside a tower (R), shutting the door on themselves! Judah promptly re-emerges from the conservatory, drags Vashti up the stairs,

ful burlesque of a latter day courtship. The narration of Lady Eve's dream is pathetic. Judah's lovelighting is romantic.

All this, however, does not redeem Judah's lie. All this is not an "idea." All this is not a play.

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of his falsehood, but act it, for Vashti's sake, growing more miserable with each new day of hypocrisy, and at last sinking beneath the agony of his shame.

Or, as in "The Pillars of Society"—a vastly greater work than "Judah"—he might have persisted in evil till a catastrophe overtook him, and, in the horror of his fate, he cried aloud and repented, humbling himself in the dust.

What does the Rev. Judah Llewellyn do? He goes on conniving at Vashti's frauds for a year, refuses the friendship of Professor Jopp, and confesses—when the fraud has been found out. Up to the last quarter of the third act he remains hardened and defiant. He suffers, of course. Being a sensitive man he could hardly escape pain. But calmly reviewing the past he says to Vashti—

"I will be your mate. If you are evil I will be evil, too. . . . You are mine! There is nothing I would change!"

And five minutes later, without any explanation, he brings Vashti into the drawing room when Lord Asgarby is about to present him with his church, forces her to utter her Confiteor and follows it up by admitting he has cheated the world and resigning his curacy.

Then he goes off to be married.

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"I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THE TRUTH."—"JUDAH," ACT II.

opens the keep with Dethic's duplicate key, shuts his chamber up and vanishes.

When everything is settled the Jopps take themselves out, the castle bell is rung, the guests rush on and Miss Jopp exclaims—

"Mr. Dethic is in the keep with his daughter!"

The keep is again unlocked. Vashti walks out with an indignant air and asks what on earth they are making such a noise about. Of course no Mr. Dethic is found in the keep, the sceptics are dumfounded and the curtain might have been rung down on the Professor's discomfiture.

But at this moment the Rev. Judah Llewellyn, who should have been in the most or well on his way to bed by now, comes forward.

He swears that Dethic has not been in the keep.

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