

## THEATRICAL.

### The Burlesque Madness.

An epidemic, which the Board of Health is powerless to arrest, has seized upon New-York and infects it in every part, counting its victims by the tens of thousands. It may be called the Mania for Burlesque. Slight touches of it have always been felt among us. Once there was an infected spot called Mitchell's Olympic, where it flourished in every season; after that nest was swept away by advancing civilization, it came upon us intermittently—like some worse things—in the heat of the Midsummer term, at Wallack's and other places. A French variety of it seized upon the vitals of this City over a year ago and held tenaciously to its stake; then the last—the most overwhelming and the most irresistible kind of the disorder, the English, (Blonde,) in the moment of our weakness, swooped upon us, and we are now hopelessly ill of it—even if we are not yet quite sick of it!

At Niblo's Garden it has broken out with unparalleled intensity; at Wood's Museum it has renewed its vigor; at the Theatre Comique it riots amid fresh victims, and the wise ones tell us that it will soon break out at the Waverly Theatre—by which name the once Hope-less Chapel is to be hereafter known.

The distinguishing symptom of the epidemic is a singular and easily detected appearance of masses of light and golden hair on the stage of the afflicted theatre; after this symptom the spectator is appalled by observing a tendency in the patients to dispossess themselves of their clothing, and it requires the greatest exertion to keep anything on them; then follow a series of piercing screams called comic singing, distorted and incoherent ravings called puns, and finally, strong convulsions denominated breakdowns and walk-arounds. Exhaustion supervenes after a fit of two or three hours each night. The remedy for this serious visitation has not yet been revealed. It is uncertain what applications will reduce the disorder—applications for places at the various box offices have been recommended, but the result of that is to increase it. Some dismal folk have predicted destruction to our community from the example of the burlesquers. It is feared that the light hair, the clotheless and the convulsive symptoms may spread to every home and carry desolation to every hearth. The true remedy may yet be adopted by the Hygienic guardians of the Metropolis; this remedy is quarantine! The infection comes through late importations from England; scarcely a steamer arrives here that does not bear fresh quantities of the golden-hair, which once landed on our shores develop into the true raving, roaring, stamping-mad burlesque! We respectfully suggest a strict quarantine and renewed vigilance toward all English vessels.

But to lay aside this figurative style of treating the burlesque madness, and talk of it as it is—one of the engrossing subjects of theatrical amusement—there are some words to be said.

The burlesque is a species of entertainment dangerous to dramatic art, because it defies criticism.

It is folly to weigh the merits of a pun—the strength of rival feminine heels and toes—and those graces of the human form which ought to be concealed from promiscuous gaze.

Art has little, if anything, to do with the success of such entertainments. A pretty face is of more help to it than genius, and distortion is its strongest point. No ugly woman ever made a success in the extravagant rôles of burlesque, and no genuine comedian ever made his exit from its wild orgies without feeling heartily ashamed of the antics he had performed to secure the measure of applause that followed him from the scene. Female face and form carry all its honors, and an idiotic parody of masculinity creates its uproarious mirth. No burlesque ever succeeded upon its literary merits. Its wit is tolerated only from a bewitching mouth, and its humor from beneath a painted nose. Its object is to upset decorum, to unseat gravity, to disarm judgment, and to intoxicate the senses. If the auditor is so befogged as to carry away no definite idea of it save that he has seen a forest of unveiled limbs snaked by a storm of wild music—its triumph is accomplished. Should he be able to remember a succession of coherent incidents, the burlesque has failed of its intended effect.

It is safe to say that judged by such a standard all the extravaganzas now being performed are unquestionable successes.

### NIBLO'S GARDEN—"THE FORTY THIEVES."

Here the well-known Lydia Thompson troupe have increased the furor awakened some months ago at another theatre. The extravaganza of "The Forty Thieves," as pro-

duced at Niblo's was originally prepared by Mr. H. J. BYRON for the English market, and has been retouched for the American trade by Mr. H. B. FARNIE. A wearisome weakness marks most of the reconstructed portion. There is none of that paralyzing audacity about the local puns,—such as usually recommends these personalities to ironical shouts which are frequently more hearty than more appreciative laughter,—but the allusions to local themes are for the main part pointless and weak. The burlesque is placed before the public, however, with all the lavish wealth of glitter, costume and accessories that Niblo's Garden is famous for. An immense corps of auxiliaries, including the now imperative ballet, clad in shining dresses, crowd the stage, and a novel view of the Robber's Cave—upon exclusive club principles, a silver forest and a brilliant *coup d'œil* called "The Jardin Mabille" are produced as specimens of the taste and skill of the painters and mechanics of the theatre. In the last scene the feverish indecencies of the Parisian can-can are brazenly interpreted by a motley mass of dancers and strangers there exhibited.

The music embraces of course all the new airs, all the old ones, and all the variations which both will bear. Of the *dramatis personæ* it is to be said that Miss LYDIA THOMPSON, as *Ganem*, offers herself from first to last in a succession of every known and unknown dance, with that amazing restlessness, vim and vigor which gives her the lead in this class of performances, and that she gives several new readings of old nursery rhymes, and sings with a nightly increasing consciousness that she has a larger theatre to fill with her voice than she ever had before. Miss WEBER is the *Morgiana* of the story, and the only novelty in her performance is that she now plays "boy" in female dress, instead of her usual tunics; there is the same freedom and unrestrained abandon about her manner,—and she flourishes at Niblo's, as if she had been playing there a year. Miss MARKHAM, who is neither an actress, nor a dancer, nor a singer, nor a creator of comic effects, beams upon the audience as a fine picture in the rôle of the robber chief *Abdallah*. The new blonde arrival, Miss GRATAN, is quite a good match of the latter in talent, &c. Mr. BECKETT continues to recall J. S. CLARKE in his touches of gesture, and does some acrobatic imitations of Bowery melodrama in the part of a ferocious and agreeable bandit. Many of the incidents of the piece are quite amusing, but the length of the performance is rather too great to admit of all being enjoyed. Three hours of unvarying nonsense is altogether too much. The funny things that come first excite the heartiest laughter, however, the most so, that where the "Female Forty Thieves" "present arms," "make ready," and strike a light from forty matches to "fire" forty cigarettes at the word of command, that where a couple of rival suitors bribe the honest Judge with bags of treasure, that where the sleeping *Ali* is rescued from instant destruction by the passing train—of his wife's dress, and that where the modern "club" occupations of the Thieves in their cave is shown. These things have made an immediate success for "The Forty Thieves," and the piece has drawn crowded houses to Niblo's every night.

### THEATRE COMIQUE—"PLUTO."

The burlesque at this house, which is also an adaptation by Mr. FARNIE of one of BYRON'S London successes, is preceded by Mr. W. H. LINGARD'S highly interesting personal and protean entertainment. LINGARD'S metamorphostical sketches became town-talk a year ago, and hence have none of the claims of novelty upon public attention, but their popularity is little diminished, and the unique transformations of this singular performer impels the same approving outbursts which first attended the exhibition. The characters now personated by Mr. LINGARD differ in some respects from those on his original programme; thus we have, instead of *Captain Jinks*, one *Sergeant Copp*, who is quite a different person altogether, although he belongs to the genus *Pluto*. "A Gent of the First Water" and "Fifth Avenue" are representations in song and individuality also, of a couple of "howling" swells, sketched from the spot, which seem to have set in for a popularity equal to that accorded to the lady "On the Beach at Long Branch." The burlesque, which follows these sketches, is a very free adaptation of mythology to modern uses. *Orpheus* and *Eurydice* are the hero and heroine of this extravaganza, but *Pluto* and not Jupiter is the presiding spirit. Mr. LINGARD plays *Pluto* in a way that shows him to be most effective in imitative mimicry. Mr. GEORGE ATKINS, who was for so many months the comic scourge in the "Black Crook," reappears here as *Eurydice's* cook and housemaid, and in the course of the play offers a ponderous blow to the burlesque madness of the hour, by appearing in the short-shirts, long golden hair, and idiotic antics of the reigning theatrical favorites. The other parts in the extravaganza are mainly played by a number of blondes,—ladies who will compare in the essential particulars with the most popular of their sex in this line now before the public. Miss ALICE DUNNING takes the lead among them for personal charms and electrical vivacity. As *Orpheus* she created the most agreeable effect. In respect of scenery "Pluto" has not been neglected, and Mr. MARSTON has furnished a glittering transformation tableaux.

### WOOD'S MUSEUM—FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD.

The entertainment here has been materially curtailed, and passes over a couple of hours now with uninterrupted pleasure to all concerned. The preliminary farce has given way to the ballet of "L'Almee," which now begins the performance and the burlesque begins before the audience has become weary of waiting for it. In performing his work of reconstruction, and preparing "The Field of the Cloth of Gold" to meet local favor, Mr. FLORENCE has not wholly dammed up the more natural sources of fun by such wretched obstructions as silly puns present, and hence the piece of itself is not insufferably dull. The affairs of history are humorously parodied, and the performers burlesque the historical heroes with hearty sense of the ludicrous. The whole is well received, and with a little less singing (which is quite ineffective) would be altogether pleasant. One improvement may be suggested: Let the rival kings ride to their meeting, upon the golden field on a couple of velocipedes, and the localization will be complete. The basket-horses now used in the scene are a relic of the past, too much worn to be tolerable on our lively stage. An amusing tournament between *Henry* and *Francis* takes place in the last scene, when the rival monarchs enter a rope ring and box for the Royal championship. The height of the ludicrous is approached when the Police burst in, break up the fight, and arrest the principals. The new *debutante*, Miss ROSE MASSEY, carries off no honors; she neither sings, dances nor acts with more ability than a hundred of her less elevated sisters do. The dresses of the piece are often quite gorgeous. Those of Mrs. FLORENCE are unusually resplendent.

### NEW YORK THEATRE.

To a well-balanced mind the next best thing after assisting at a perfect theatrical performance is to witness a thoroughly bad one. The impression which the latter makes is decidedly the most profound. It has the same effect as reading a medical almanac—it makes us feel as if Mankind were all miserable wretches together, and observed nothing but thorns. It is very wholesome, however, and should be tried occasionally as a sort of tonic. Those who desire to follow this recommendation may visit the New York Theatre, and see the efforts of Mr. MCKEAN BUCHANAN and his dramatic exotics, in a play entitled "The Plebeian Daughter." The performance is rescued from thorough badness, perhaps, by an occasional gleam of intelligence which marks the acting of Miss BUCHANAN. This young lady is undeniably out of place in the wretched company of actors which surround her, and should be rescued. She has many germs of talent for emotional acting, and a season or two devoted to the apprentice-parts of her art might develop these for the public benefit and her own. As for the rest, we propose a measure by which they

will get as much pay with half their present labor: Let them stand still one half the time, give their eyebrows a spell of rest, and speak from their chest—which is about one-third the distance from which they now bring their words.