

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Alas, Poor Yorick

Row upon row of empty seats, not a soul in the boxes; silence, almost funereal, only intensified by the whispers of the handful of people seated at long intervals throughout the house. Have we come too soon; have we mistaken the time? It must be so; this can not be the audience of the evening. Alas no; we have not come too late. We are not mistaken as to the time; see, the orchestra are in their places, and now strike up an old, familiar overture that they have inflicted upon us until its very inharmoniousness has become dear to us through association. Yet, why this change? A good change, for the name upon the bill is that of one who, years ago, packed the theater to overflowing; filled every seat and every box with beautiful women and distinguished men, whose gay appearance, reflecting that of the reigning goddess upon the stage, filled my youthful mind with ideas of paradise. Yes, the name is the same, and here, advancing timorously to the front as if doubtful of her reception, is the old-time figure of yore, the figure whose every motion called forth thunders of applause, whose voice every ear was strained to hear – the queen of opera bouffe, Aimeé. Can this be the same Aimeé, the bright, dashing songstress of old, this timorous, appealing woman who almost seems to beg that we will greet her with favor, and not be too cold hearted and critical. The gay dress, the gleaming jewels on neck and arms, are the same, but the confidence and fire are gone. I for one will not be critical. I give her my hearty applause, and try to make up in my effusiveness the coldness of those who surround me.

I am applauding for the days of long ago, for the pleasure that Aimeé has long since given me, in the time when those seated round me were unable in their ardor, to make noise enough. Twice during the past week I have stolen in, and for the sake of old times sat in the midst of a cold crowd, applauding every act and every word of the poor, worn out old woman before me.

There is no sadder sight than this:– the decay of a popular songstress. Twenty five years ago Aimeé had at her command the hearts and hands of every one. She was absolute mistress of her audience. She had but to smile, and every man and woman in the house burst into happy laughter; she had but to look distressed, and tears came from many an eye unaccustomed to weeping. She was, and is yet, the representative of opera bouffe in this

country. Her name, more than any other, is identified with those pretty French operettas that are so fast being forgotten.

And now that she has become old and has lost her voice, she has given up her operas and taken to acting. With her youth has gone her popularity which is bread and meat to her,- her very life. It is not need of money that keeps her on the stage, it is a necessity for the applause of the theater. And how fickle is her audience. The people of long ago have departed, and she alone is faithful. As her poor, cracked voice toiled with the old familiar words, "She's as pretty as a picture," not a note of applause was heard. Her voice, if not her heart was gone in very truth, "was gone, and she was forlorn" at last. Her face showed that she saw it; there was no mistaking that; the poor, appealing face, beseeching the audience for their sympathy and their approval, was very pitiful to one who had seen the same face bright with triumph, as its happy owner was carried along by the enthusiasm of the spectators to a gaiety and abandon that was irresistible.

Aimeé has passed away with her opera bouffe "The Mikado" and "Pinafore", have taken the place of "La Jolie" "Parfumeuse," and "La Grande Duchesse." And yet they in their time delighted us all, and it is an ungrateful world that has forgotten them. Aimeé is a better actress today than many on our stage that are applauded to the echo. But the Aimeé of the past is gone.

"The flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow dies."

Charles Theodore Greve

Budget
Hinman editor
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