With the First Nighters

"THE LIGHT THAT FAILED"

By T. G.

The business of art is to reveal the beauty underlying all things. We believe there is a line something like that in "Passing of the Third Floor Back," and Forbes-Robertson in the severe test of portraying the beauty in the character of Dick Heldar, is masterly in his art.

Dominant and individual as he would be in most company, he is particularly luminous in his present surroundings for "The Light That Failed" scarcely requires any other stellar brightness, and if it did we doubt if his company would be equal to it.

There is no good reason why this story of Kipling's should ever have been dramatized. Those familiar with the story who had never seen the play, wondered what could be made of it. And nothing has been made of it except in the greatness of Forbes-Robertson's dramatic conception. The play is not the thing, it is the actor, and the range of his powers is all that makes the stage picture of poor blind Dickie worth the seeing. George Fleming, who dramatized the story and changed it considerably, has interpolated numerous lines and situations that are helpful, but then, too, he has omitted much of the Kipling that would have added to the beauty of the play immeasurably, and the liberties he has taken with the finish in order to create what he evidently believed would be a happier impression, destroyed the effect and marred the picture beyond repair.

To diverge a moment and cite an instance of what the playwright might have done, here is an excerpt from the story when Dickie and Maisie are alone beside the sea:

"I know such little heavens that I could take you to—islands tucked away under the line. You sight them after weeks of crashing through water as black as black marble because it's so deep, and you sit in the fore-chains day after day and see the sun rise almost afraid because the sea's so lonely."

"Who is afraid?—you, or the sun?"

"The sun, of course. And there are noises under the sea, and sounds overhead in a clear sky. Then you find your island alive with hot, moist orchids that make mouths at you and can do everything except talk. There's a waterfall in it three hundred feet high, just like a sliver of green jade laced with silver; and millions of wild bees live up in the rocks; and you can hear the fat cocoanuts falling from the palms; and you order an ivory-white servant to sling you a long yellow hammock with tassels on it like ripe maize, and you put up your feet and hear the bees hum and the water fall till you go to sleep."

"Can one work there?"

"Certainly. One must do something always. You hang your canvas up in a palm-tree and let the parrots criticise. When they scuffle you heave a ripe custard-apple at them, and it bursts in a lather of cream. There are hundreds of places. Come and see them."

"I don't quite like that place. It sounds lazy. Tell me another."

"What do you think of a big, red, dead city built of red sandstone, with raw green aloes growing between the stones, lying out neglected on honey-colored sands? There are forty dead kings there Maisie, each in a gorgeous tomb finer than all the others. You look at the palaces and streets and shops and tanks, and think that men must live there, till you find a wee gray squirrel rubbing its nose all alone in the market-place, and a jeweled peacock struts out of a carved doorway and spreads its tail against a marble screen as fine pierced as point-lace. Then a monkey—a little black monkey—walks through the main square to get a drink from a tank forty feet deep. He slides down the creepers to the water's edge, and a friend holds him by the tail, in case he should fall in."

"Is all that true?"

"I have been there and seen. Then evening comes, and the lights change till it's just as though you stood in the heart of a king-opal. A little before sundown, as punctually as clock-work, a big bristly wild boar, with all his family following, trots through the city gate, churning the foam on his tusks. You climb on the shoulder of a blind black stone god and watch that pig choose himself a palace for the night and strump in wagging his tail. Then the night-wind gets up, and the sands move, and you hear the desert outside the city singing, 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' and everything is dark till the moon rises. Maisie, darling, come with me and see what the world is really like. It's very lovely, and it's very horrible, but I won't let you see anything horrid,—and it doesn't care your life or mine for pictures or anything else except doing its own work and making love. Come, and I'll show you how to brew sangaree, and sling a hammock, and—oh, thousands of things, and you'll see for yourself what color means, and we'll find out together what love means, and then, maybe, we shall be allowed to do some work. Come away!"

Forgetting for a moment the imposing star, it is rather painful to refer to some of the others who are assisting Sir Johnston in his farewell, which, by the way we do not believe is his farewell. There is no reason for it unless he is tired of it all. Miss Laura Cowie, who has been heralded as a great find in the dramatic world, failed to make the sensation which it was predicted she would and failed utterly. Expressionless, stolid as teakwood, cold and mechanical in action and diction and with apparently no understanding of the charcter of Maisie, she was a complete disappointment. It is to wonder what she will do with Ophelia. The Bessie of Mary Sumner scintillated in contrast, and the little touches allowed Adeline Bourne as the Red Haired Girl were artistically done. Among the men, the Torp of Ian Robertson was the best delineation, Charles Graham's Cassavetti was bad and the Nilghal of Percy Rhodes was hardly convincing. It would be impossible to enthuse over "The Light That Failed," or anyone connected with its stage version were it not for Forbes-Robertson. But before him it is easy to bend the knee in homage

* * *

The transformation that has apparently taken place in Salt Lake's composite theatrical life in the past year or two is remarkable.

In the past the Salt Lake theatre going public was heralded across the country as hypercritical; it was told broadcast that it wanted only the best and that while Salt Lake was a good show town, it didn't do to try to put anything over on it, because the people had been educated up to a standard which made it impossible for a theatre to continue successfully after it was known that the policy was to give the public the worst of it.

Whether the coupon system through which newspapers give theatre parties to every family in town every day free of charge combined with the general business depression in the country is responsible for the change or not is not definitely known, but it is thought that it has had a great deal to do with it, for otherwise it is difficult to understand how a theatre going public, from the man in the highest priced seat to the cheapest bird in the top gallery can stand for the bunk that is being handed out by those who control the cheap vaudeville circuits that cross the country. The performers themselves are laughing themselves sick taking the easy money, and ask the natural question why they should worry if the public will stand for it and cry for more.

It is a sad criterion, however, on our theatre going public which once was noted as the most exacting between the seas.

* * *

ORPHEUM.

With another splendid bill at the Orpheum this week, that vaudeville house seems to have taken on its old stride for which those who delight in high class vaudeville should be truly thankful. Charles Kellogg, the singularly gifted nature singer, is here again and is proving equally fascinating to those who have admired him in the past and those to whom his performance is new. Aside from his wonderful bird songs, whatever he says is always of the deepest interest and there is something about him so sincere, so genuine and his views are so liberal, his understanding so broad and the sweetness of his nature so appealing that one instinctively realizes that there stands a man.

Adair and Adair open the bill with some clever horizontal bar work and poor comedy; Marie Fenton follows with some happily chosen songs, which she sings as well as forty others in the run of vaudeville; Morris Cronin and his merry men juggle away the moments in a fantastic act which includes among other things, a novelty in marionettes which cavort about a darkened stage, the unique lighting effects being rather unusual. The Chieftain Caupolican, a South American Indian of fine intelligence, has a remarkable singing voice and he hit the ball at regular intervals with his remarks between songs. Lydell, Roberts and Lydell in "A Native of Arkansas," have a screamingly funny act, though most of it is centered in the chatter and dancing of the one who plays the old boy. The Alco trio, who close the performance, are finished equilibrists, though there is nothing new in their act.

* * *

PANTAGES

There is a hopeless show at Pantages with one or two spots in it bright enough to shine through the mirk of the rest. It is pretty nearly time for some comedians to quit stealing Frank Tinney's stuff. The most flagrant case of this kind we have ever seen is in the act of Henry and Harrison, the man being guilty of any number of Tinney expressions, his method is quite the same and in chatter, actions and mannerisms, his work is strongly reminiscent of Tinney's stuff that followed the Gaby Deslys sketch at the Winter Garden. And to go further back, Frank did a lot of it out west before the cities claimed him for their own. More's the wonder that clever people like Henry and Harrison cannot find enough to make their entertainment go without resorting to such methods.

"Ruin," a sketch by somebody named Walter Montague, is a fool thing that apparently has as its object the raillery of the masses against the classes, and Mr. Montague's result has served no purpose but to picture his silliness.

The Vestoff trio has an entertaining dancing act; Col. Billy Link and his soldiers are as tiresome as usual; the Lombard-Parker people with their tread-mill dogs are worth seeing and the Novelty Quartette may score after while when some of the members become less amateurish. There is a good deal of snap to their act and they have one or two numbers that they needn't be ashamed of in any company of class. The biggest hit of the show, was Eddie Fitzpatrick's violin playing and he was obliged to respond to an encore.