

THE THEATRE

THE PLAYGOER

Plays That Live and Die, and Why.

Another questioner burst in upon the guests last night. "They may be more good plays this season than usual. How many of them will live—ever see another season?"

Prophecy is no part of the business of this column. Nor does the questioner seem to know that his query has been addressed each year for the last quarter of a century in some way or other to the drama to some one purveying printed ink. It has been asked, in one form or another, for a hundred years, and it has been answered in various ways.

Any dramatist worth his footlights would cheerfully write for posterity, if he knew how. His first concern is with audiences now inhabiting the vast round auditorium. If he could formulate a process by which his plays could be sure of revival every few years for the next ten generations he would do so without urging. Theatres-as-they-are-syndicated cannot be expected to include in revivals actor-managers, if ever the race returns to the lurid glimmers of Broadway, can revive the plays of the past, and repertory theatres are bound to do so, after they are firmly established. But did you ever trouble to ask yourself how many of the successful plays of ten years ago you would care to see now? How many plays of the last ten years?

Plays are almost as ephemeral as newspapers, and quite as clearly things of a season as the "best selling" novels. The public, like its precursors of old, is always crying for some new thing. And that craving for "novelty" is stirred by the appetizers served up by the wholesale providers of public entertainment.

After all, when you have excepted Shakespeare's and two or three others, there were very few "old plays" that are as good as the best of the new. If this is heresy, make the most of it, and count up the old plays whose reproduction would be welcomed by discriminating audiences nowadays. The chances are that you cannot readily remember the names of two dozen.

Old plays! It is not so easy to know what a New Yorker means by "an old play." When he calls a person just beyond the teens a "veteran," what will he consider age in a play? The other day a commentator wrote of "The Little Minister" and other old plays of about the same date. By that reckoning an early Clyde Fitch must be a classic.

A good play seldom grows old, and a great play is always young, even if it were first performed fifty or three hundred years ago. Are there not about as many "great plays" as there are "great books"? Some sun dried folks think that a great play must be miraculous in its origin. And others have such a superstitious reverence for the old times that they believe the most of the play written before 1850 were far superior to any subsequently produced. The fact is that most of the ante-fifty plays were poor stuff. They were filled with lifeless, and they were deadly dull, according to present lights. Where they are to be seen as a gallery of wax figures. More good plays were produced in the last twenty years than in the preceding hundred years, and a repertory theatre that knows its business will revive some of them. Theatres-as-they-are-syndicated will be glad to sell the rights at a low price.

It is constantly said that long runs kill good acting. This means, of course, that long runs minimize the opportunities for actors to get anything like an adequate experience in a varied round of parts. But long runs also kill good plays. Where the play goes on the shelf.

The death and burial of a good play is due in these days to managerial strangulation. Theatres-as-they-are-syndicated do not look for "old" plays to revive, but for new ones to run. It is not their job to do anything else. And as they have had their eye on the business for so many years they have nourished the public with the belief that the new thing is the best thing.

If modern plays do not live quite as many years as old plays, they live quite as many nights, have as many performances as the old plays had. Indeed, some of the modern successes have more nights than the old favorites had. In the so-called "palmy days" a successful piece ran a few nights and then "went into repertory," and was revived from time to time. Runs were the exception, not the rule. And the run depended quite as much upon the players as upon the play, a sage observation which time has not dimmed.

Who nowadays wants to see those Victorian favorites, "The Marble Heart" or "The Iron Chest," or "The Green Bushes"? Does any one really wish for a revival of "The Lady of Lyons" or "The Duke's Dowry"? Are there yearnings for "The Stranger" and "Lola" or "The Female"? But these plays assisted many favorite stars in their courses.

Twenty-five years ago Mary Anderson was going about the country and filling the largest theatres with performances of "Fazio," "The Daughter of Roland," "The Hunchback," "Love," "Ingram," and other plays. Infants of that sort. Nobody would care enough about those plays now to spend car fare on them. Our fathers and grandfathers and their forebears liked to have their serious plays on stiffs, and they had a tenderness for fine phrases. But Sheridan Knowles and Milman would today empty houses they formerly filled.

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VALLI VALLI. In "The Dollar Princess," Knickerbocker Theatre.

GUY BATES POST AND ANNIE RUSSELL. In "The Nigger," The New Theatre.

CYRIL SCOTT. In "The Lottery Man," Bijou Theatre.

THE FRENCH STAGE

"The Lily" for Belasco—As It Was Done in Paris.

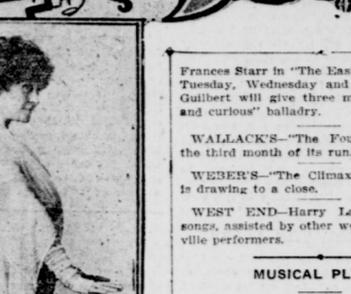
Paris, November 27. "Le Lily," the sentimental comedy with a dash of suffragette romanticism, in four acts, by Pierre Wolff and Gaston Leroux, which, under the title "The Lily," will be produced in America by David Belasco, was first produced at the Vaudeville Theatre in December, 1898. It comes as a staggering hammer blow at the stratagem of moral ideals of French society imbued with the traditions of the old regime. The painter Arnaud lives a solitary, open air, artistic life in a ruined abbey in Brittany. The only person he meets are the De Magny and the Durcey, two families residing in neighboring chateaus. The one, the Comte de Magny is a broken-down nobleman, but ruined by extravagance and dissipation. His son Gérard is about to marry the family esquire, by marrying Mlle. Darcey, the heiress of a rich, narrow minded manufacturer, Bertrand, a stupid, bigoted, unattractive girl, with a miserable social position. The Comte de Magny has also two daughters, Odette, the elder, is an unmarried woman of thirty-five, who has been a sort of upper servant in the household, and whose girlhood has been sacrificed to keeping up appearances for her father, Christiane, the younger daughter, is a charming girl of twenty, brilliant, romantic and high spirited. Neither Odette nor Christiane has a dowry, and this in the eyes of French aristocratic traditions is a fatal bar to their ever getting married. Christiane gathers lovers and makes trips on her bicycle in the grounds of the old abbey. She meets there, in an attachment springs up between them. Christiane at first is not aware that Arnaud has a wife. Arnaud, in fact, is married, but his wife, from whom he is separated but who will not consent to divorce, is a "faded, sunken woman, who makes every one about her miserable. Arnaud, realizing the extreme fragility of a young girl's reputation, tells Christiane that it is not prudent to be so much in each other's company, as, he (Arnaud) being married, their union is out of the question. Christiane's illusions seem crushed by this avowal.

At the country house of the De Magny we see the odious, unattractive young "arriviste" son, Gérard, the supercilious, purse-proud, vain Mlle. Darcey, and also find here the elder sister, Odette, whose youth and beauty have withered under the household work of the family. Mlle. Darcey's father appears. He intimates to De Magny that there are insurmountable obstacles to the proposed marriage between his daughter and Gérard. From his explanations, Darcey says that evil reports are current about the intimacy of Christiane and Arnaud. De Magny cannot conceive that his daughter, educated and brought up in the severe schools of family tradition and the Church, could have been guilty of such behavior. His questions, Christiane, who at last, pushed to desperation by the poverty and selfish vanity of her father and brother, finally bursts the fetters of restraint and shouts, "Well, yes; I have a lover!" It is not pardon that she asks; not remorse nor penitence that she desires. She turns against the conventional cruelty that would reduce her to a willing shipwreck like her sister Odette. Christiane claims her right to live and to love. She glories in it. She castigates her fortune hunting wretch of a brother, and flounders the heartless egotism of her father: "I make my choice between celibacy and life. I give up nothing I have in my soul, and I live a spontaneous life, I am myself, I love!" This impetuous outburst of freedom is hailed, to the amazement of all, by the elder sister Odette, who cries out: "She is right!"

Continuing, Odette turns to her stupefied father and says: "It is your 'honor' that is killing us. It has only succeeded in making of me a woman pure, but desperate and broken hearted. Go, Christiane, go toward life, toward love, toward freedom, the ransom for you!" Christiane leaves the house. Later we find Christiane and Arnaud at Sorrento enjoying to the full the delights of the "union libre." Her elder sister Odette, with a country cousin, has been sent in quest of Christiane on a mission to persuade her to come back to the fold. Odette is concealed behind a tangle of flowers. Christiane and Arnaud walk past her, but do not see her. Odette hears the words: "Darling, how I love you!" uttered by Arnaud, to which the only reply, young sister the tortures that had poisoned her own life were rendered with tremendous emotion. Mlle. Lily, one of the most talented of the younger Parisian actresses, imparted to Christiane a bright, fresh, impassioned temperament of love and of refinement. Rousseau played the part of Arnaud, and Lérand, one of the most finished, subtle and accomplished actors in France, invested the Comte de Magny with glittering, mundane elegance, and a mask-making innate selfishness and jealousy.

"Le Lily" was received at first with great enthusiasm. It ran for about thirty nights. There are strong artistic and grand humanitarian outbursts in the play. Pierre Wolff and Gaston Leroux launched a sort of battering ram against the traditional conventions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The thesis is bold, daring and effective. All the trumps are, however, in the hands of the game. The young girl, Christiane, her lover, Arnaud, and also the older, sacrificed sister, Odette, are intensely sympathetic. Not so are the cards dealt to the other side. De Magny, his son Gérard, the supercilious heiress, Mlle. Darcey; her narrow-minded father, are all abject, servile creatures. The thesis of the "Lily" is the declaration of independence, as it were, of a young girl, the breaking in (wrench) of the conventional chains of enforced celibacy; the claim of the "right to love."

It is a character study with some novel and difficult effects. There is the attempt to denote the musician while his brain is ringing with snatches of melody and undeveloped motives; and, apart from his frenzied zeal in making and altering notes in a bankbook and his excited gestures and sweeping movements of the arms, as though he were conducting an invisible orchestra, there is the mortal work. The composer is in his lodgings, now pausing to put on paper definite traces of the melodies surging through his mind, and then rushing madly about the stage in pursuit of adequate forms of expression; and as the orchestra plays his own matchless scores his thoughts are harmonized and perfectly conveyed—an illusion not ordinarily obtained on the stage. There is also the effect of deafness, of which much is made in this play. For the greatest composer the fate of complete deafness was reserved; and when he was writing the most sublime music it was little less



CONSTANCE COLLIER. In "Israel," Criterion Theatre.

lack of adjustment to the conditions which surround them. Within a month a play that is quite old enough to remain young will be seen at The New Theatre—"The School for Scandal." One hundred and thirty-three years have passed since this delightful comedy, which for most spectators of the present day will have the charm of novelty, was first performed at Drury Lane, Sheridan at that time was only twenty-six years old. And it is worth remembering that the play as you read it now is not at all points the play as Sheridan wrote it. No authorized or correct edition of "The School for Scandal" was published in England during the author's lifetime. The play as succeeding generations have known it comes from Dublin, not from London. Sheridan gave a prompt copy of the play to his sister, Mrs. Lefanu, who sold it to Ryder, the manager of the Dublin Theatre, for 10 guineas, a further consideration being the free entrance to the theatre for Mrs. Lefanu and her family. From this copy, as it had passed through Ryder's hands and had survived performances at his theatre, the Dublin edition of the comedy was prepared. That edition was "mainly correct," such alterations as it contains being of a minor character. Still, it would be a satisfaction to know that Sheridan had authorized and prepared an edition of his own.

In the nature of things, playgoers who have seen notable revivals of "The School for Scandal" cannot be expected to find their recollections of their favorite Sir Peter and Ladies Teazle and the Brothers Surface effaced by the performers at The New Theatre, however admirable these latter comedians may prove to be. The Sir Peter who cannot fade from the memory of the present chronicler are three. Others passed by, but these remain and live—William Warren, John Gilbert and William Farnes. Of Charles Surfaces—Charles Wyldham, Charles Coghlan and Henry Neville. And Lady Teazle—but that is a story to which one may find occasion to return.

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THE COMING WEEK

NEW PRODUCTIONS.
Monday Night, Dec. 6.—At the Bijou Theatre, Cyril Scott in "The Lottery Man."

COMEDY AND DRAMA.
ACADEMY OF MUSIC—Henrietta Crosman will be seen here in "Sham" throughout the week.

ASTOR—"Seven Days," the funniest farce of years.

BELASCO—"Is Matrimony a Failure?" It will be played here until February 1, when Eugene Walter's new play, "Just a Wife," will succeed it.

BIJOU—Cyril Scott in "The Lottery Man," a comedy in three acts by Rida Johnson Young.

COMEDY—"The Melting Pot." Zangwill's play passed its 160th night a week ago.

CRITERION—"Israel." Powerful play by Bernstein, author of "The Thief."

EMPIRE—John Drew in "Inconstant George." Only two weeks more.

GAIETY—"The Fortune Hunter." John Barrymore in the leading part.

GARDEN THEATRE—"His Name on the Door." Frank Lord's play, with Byron Douglas, Walter D. Greene, Wilson Melrose, Ethel Clayton and Louise Closser Hall in the leading parts.

GARRICK—"The Harvest Moon." The latest play by Augustus Thomas. George Nash in the principal part.

FRANCES STARR in "The Easiest Way." Next Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday Yvette Guilbert will give three matinees in "rare and curious" ballads.

WALLACKS—"The Fourth Estate," in the third month of its run.

WEBER—"The Climax." Its long run in drawing to a close.

WEST END—Harry Lauder in Scotch songs, assisted by other well known vaudeville performers.

MUSICAL PLAYS.
BROADWAY—"The Midnight Sons," having passed through the summer and autumn, seems likely to last through the winter.

CASINO—"The Girl and the Wizard." Sam Bernard stars in this.

DALY'S—Frank Daniels in "The Belle of Brittany."

HERALD SQUARE—Lew Fields in "Old Dutch." A characteristic Fieldian farce set to music.

KNICKERBOCKER—"The Dollar Princess." This piece has nearly reached its 160th night.

LYRIC—"The Chocolate Soldier." Best comic opera in New York.

NEW AMSTERDAM—Adeline Genée, the world's most delightful dancer. The name of the piece, which she pervades with grace, is "The Silver Star."

NEW YORK—"The Man Who Owns Broadway." A Cuban piece, with Raymond Hitchcock.

VARIETY HOUSES.
ALHAMBRA—Billy B. Van and the Beaumont Sisters will be here this week in "Props," also Charles Lovenberg's Operatic Festival, Edna Leby, in "High Life in Jail," Stuart, "The Male Part," and other excellent entertainers.

AMERICAN—A two weeks' vaudeville festival, with Ceella Loftus, Sidney Drew, Montgomery and Moore, Brech's Parisian Living Statues, Kate Elmore, Dorch and Russell and Mlle. Lorette and her dog.

COLONIAL—Valeska Suratt is announced to appear here this week in Paul Potter's "The Belle of the Boulevard." "Dazie" will be seen in a new dance by Robert Hood Bowers. Jessie L. Lasky will present "The Pianoplayers." R. L. Goldberg, the "foolish" questioner, will be on hand.

EDEN MUSEE—"Heroes of the Nation" are here in wax. The Hungarian Band plays.

HAMMESTEIN'S VICTORIA—Albert Chevalier, the great English character actor, will be here this week. These performers will also assist: Flo Irwin and company, in George Ade's farce, "Mrs. Peckham's Carouse"; James Thornton, monologist; McDonald, Ellis, McKenna and Dunn, quartet; Cook and Loenz, eccentric comedians; Hal Davis and Inez Mearnsley in a one-act comedy, "The Unexpected," by Edmund Day; Gillham

SAVOY—Last three weeks of "The Awakening of Helena Rubik." Margaret Anglin has achieved a remarkable success in this.

STUYVESANT—Only two weeks more of

CAMILLE OBER.
Keith & Proctor's.

GEORGE LASHWOOD. Plaza Music Hall.

NANETTE FLACK. Hippodrome.

DAZIE. Colonial Theatre.

HARRY LAUDER. The West End Theatre.

and Murray, black faced comedians. Sunday concerts as usual.

HIPPODROME—Fourteenth week of "A Trip to Japan," "Inside the Earth" and "The Ballet of Jewels." Second week of the new circus, with "Desperado," who dives from the dome to the stage. Also Marcelino, the clown, and all the old favorites.

KEITH & PROCTOR'S FIFTH AVENUE—Camille Ober, the French soprano, with a range of four octaves, will sing here this week. Others are: The Six Musical Cuties, J. Francis Dooley and Corinne Sayles, in "Pavement Patter"; The Bonhair Troupe, acrobats; James and Sadie Leonard, in a travesty on "Antony and Cleopatra."

PLAZA—George Lashwood, the famous English comedian, will make his first American appearance here. The Four Americans stay for a second week, with Paul Nicholson and Miss Norton, in "Ella's All Right"; Diamond and Beatrice, Harry Johnson, Ralph Johnstone and Tyler and Burton.

REVUES DE FIN D'ANNEE. The typical "réves de fin d'année" are now cropping up in all the Paris music halls and variety theatres, with the profusion of blackberries in July. Mlle. Steinhell is this year the dominating personality in all these bright and frisky satires that recount with cinematographic rapidity the events, scandals and episodes of the Parisian year. The "trick" widow, as she is called, to distinguish her from the "merry widow," receives, on the whole, a favorable theatrical treatment. It is not the fascinating Mme. Steinhell, but the judges, the officials, who are the victims of the biting satire of the boulevards.

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MARY BOLAND. In "Inconstant George," Empire Theatre.

BEETHOVEN PLAY

Marriage of Convenience Between Drama and Music.

London, November 26. Anecdotes with a musical setting do not make a play, even with the best stage management. M. Fauchois's "Beethoven," whether enacted in Paris or at His Majesty's Theatre with an elastic adaptation by Mr. Louis N. Parker, is not drama. There is a series of pictures of the musician and his associates at three periods; but there is neither action nor plot, and a curiously invertebrate play closes with a fantasy, in which the symphonies are impersonated as maidens. Such interest as it has—and the first night audience was most enthusiastic—comes from the abandonment of the ordinary conventions of stage writing, from the wonderful make-up of Sir Herbert Tree and from the musical illustrations of the composer's thought. The actor-manager has never shown more cleverness and inventive skill of byplay. Characteristic traits and foibles are suggested by a thousand little touches, of which the cumulative effect is considerable. Yet there is no Beethoven with exaltation of spiritual nature to carry him even in the solitude of complete deafness to the master heights among the inspired.

In the first act, which passes in Beethoven's garden near Vienna in 1800, Beethoven is exhibited as an eccentric, absent-minded musician, irritable and contemptuous in his treatment of his self-seeking, vulgar brothers and their wives, fond of children, indifferent to the sympathetic patronage of the Archduke Rudolph and other court dignitaries, frank and affectionate with his friend Schindler, and impressionable with women. The act closes with a love scene between him and Giulietta Guicciardi, who finally jilts him for a titled suitor and leaves him the beggarly consolation of writing a wedding march, and, subsequently, lending money to her. In the second act, staged for his lodgings, three years afterward, the musician's carelessness in dress is illustrated, since he has returned to his room without his coat, when he has left under a hedge; his methods of composition are denoted by his preoccupation with ideas and fancies, which are clamoring for expression; and there are signs of his increasing infirmity, with a culminating stroke of tragedy, when, while conducting a rehearsal of one of his own pieces, he suddenly exclaims: "I can hear nothing!" In the third act, passing in the old house of the Spanish Black Friars, during 1827, he is neglected by his heartless nephew and housekeeper, and left to die in his solitude, poverty and childlessness, after he has been soled by the apparition of his ecstatic spirits representing his symphonies and calling themselves his children.

It is a character study with some novel and difficult effects. There is the attempt to denote the musician while his brain is ringing with snatches of melody and undeveloped motives; and, apart from his frenzied zeal in making and altering notes in a bankbook and his excited gestures and sweeping movements of the arms, as though he were conducting an invisible orchestra, there is the mortal work. The composer is in his lodgings, now pausing to put on paper definite traces of the melodies surging through his mind, and then rushing madly about the stage in pursuit of adequate forms of expression; and as the orchestra plays his own matchless scores his thoughts are harmonized and perfectly conveyed—an illusion not ordinarily obtained on the stage. There is also the effect of deafness, of which much is made in this play. For the greatest composer the fate of complete deafness was reserved; and when he was writing the most sublime music it was little less

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