ABOUT OPERA IN ENGLISH

SINGERS MUST FIRST SPEAK THE TONGUE.

Obstacles in the Way of Realizing a Beautiful Dream and Reasons Why It Ought to Be Realized—Can We Have a Paris Conservatoire in This Country?

A few evenings back some earnest men and women assembled at a banquet with a purpose. The banquet with a purpose is one of the evils of our time. Publicity which can be attained only at the expense of digestion is an expensive method of advertising, but it is much practised in English speaking countries. The "speech" habit is so widespread here that audiences have been known to call for an extemporaneous address from an opera tenor just because he had been called out eleven times. Last Tuesday night scores of men shouted "Speech! Speech!" at Cleofonte Campanini, a conductor.

In a land where talk is so pervasive one does not wonder that men and women dine together expressly for the purpose of making speeches afterward. When the topic of the dinner is dear to their hearts it must make the eating of viands a mighty serious business. However, that is not a matter for deep consideration at this time.

The dinner of Wednesday evening had for its subject opera in English. Of course there are numerous persons who would rejoice to see opera given in English at the Metropolitan Opera House. THE SUN'S observer of musical proceedings long years ago expressed himself as earnestly in favor of the performance of operas in English.

Many other writers on musical subjects have expressed similar views, and as for American musicians, of course they express them. Why should they not? The travelling opera companies have made no impression on New York. The net result of all the agitation of the subject which has taken place in the last fifteen years was the experimental season of Mr. Savage at the Metropolitan and the production of Mr. Converse's "Pipe of Desire." "Königskinder" was to have been produced in English, but for reasons which have already been made public it was decided to perform it with the German text.

Now the advocates of the plan of giving all operas in English at the Metropolitan are not numerous. Most of those interested in the matter would be satisfied if a few operas were thus performed. But this does not seem to be a logical position. The rational demand is for the exclusion of all foreign tongues in order that operas may be understood just as plays are.

There are several interesting points which readily occur to the mind. In the first place there is the practical question as to how satisfactory singers of opera in English could be obtained. There are not a few singers of high rank in the operatic world whose native tongue is English and it seems therefore that there should be no difficulty in filling out casts with English speaking singers.

Except in the tenor department this is perfectly true. There are not many English speaking tenors. Riccardo Martin is available, but he is suitable only for lyric rôles. There are several others in Europe, but on the whole it would be much easier to make a list of women and of basses and barytones whose native language is English. Mr. Bonci, however, has proved that we might well use foreign born tenors.

But the trouble does not end with writing down the names of these singers. Disagreeable things have to be said in the discussion of art topics, and there is no way of evading the assertion at this point that hardly any of the English speaking singers can sing English text so that it can be understood.

Some of them cannot sing any text intelligibly. It matters not whether they sing German, French or Italian, it all sounds alike. The reason for this is perfectly plain to every one except the singers themselves. There are certain things which these singers cannot say when they sing. Some of them cannot pronounce this consonant and that, others cannot make more than two vowel sounds. Many have difficulty with both consonants and vowels.

Some cannot enunciate any consonants without moving the lower jaw up and down and twisting all the muscles of the face and neck to such an extent that it is quite impossible to maintain that calm poise of the organs of sound essential to the delivery of a musical tone.

Others cannot make any singing tone except on "ah" or "oh." Hence when they have to say "fierce" they say "farce" and when they have to say "fury" they say "fahry" and so on to the cataclysmal end.

These singers make just as big a muddle of German or French as they do of English, and for the same reason. But in the foreign languages we do not take so much notice of it. We are not listening for every syllable of the text, especially those of us who do not understand the foreign tongue.

The advocates of opera in English are going to find this a very serious matter. They expect to remedy the evil by the establishment of schools of diction. They will learn that no school of diction can make a singer sing a vowel sound which his vocal method makes impossible. They will learn that the school of diction cannot teach a singer to enunciate consonants when the real trouble is that he has to stop singing whenever he tries to form a word perfectly.

The real source of bad treatment of text in singing is bad singing, and in very many cases bad habits of speech in daily life. With Americans the latter plays widespread havoc, for most Americans speak English atrociously.

For illustration see the stage. There was a time when the stage was an authority on the delivery of English text. It certainly is nothing of the sort now. The beautiful speech of the classic period of American acting has entirely disappeared and something which approaches sadly near to the style of the conversation heard in the Broadway restaurants has taken its place.

And this is in itself but the outcome of a condition which is stupendously larger and more significant than anything exclusively connected with the theatre, either dramatic or lyric. It is a part of the growing contempt for culture in this country. It is a product of that same sordidly commercial spirit which is insistently demanding that our universities cease to be institutions for the production of scholars and gentlemen and devote their attention altogether to the business of teaching men vocations by which they may earn their livings.

Great numbers of the college students of to-day cannot spell. Quite as many of them cannot either write or speak three consecutive sentences of sound English. And no one cares that they should be able to do so. For years past it has been the custom of the purely commercial minds of this country to deride the young college graduate because he was not ready to step into some trade or business, but had to begin at the bottom and learn it. What good, these people continually ask, is a college education?

The possession of elegant manner of speech used to be regarded as the first mark of a gentleman. To-day the man who wastes his time over questions of grammar or pronunciation is looked upon as a "crank." Still more is the seeker after liquid sound and crystalline clarity of enunciation deemed a trifler, who does not understand that the real business of life is to get money and to get it fast.

Until the inevitable reaction comes and people of position in this country have the same regard for the ornamental externals of daily speech and manners as cultivated Europeans have the advocates of opera in English will find their path blocked by the inability of American singers to say words in song. The few who can do it are not numerous enough to form the nucleus of an opera company, and some of them are not of the operatic mould anyhow. They are and must remain artists of the concert platform.

There is, however, still another consideration and that is the attitude of the public toward the opera. At present nine-tenths of the people who patronize opera in this country do not care in the least about understanding the text. They take little or no interest in the story of the opera and they make no demands that the music shall have an organic relation to the text. All that they really care about is that the score shall furnish opportunities for the exhibition of the most sensuous allurements of the different voices, to which these opera-goers listen precisely as they would listen to instruments.

Now let us suppose that the beautiful dreams of the advocates of opera in English could be realized. What would happen? A real and troublesome revolt of the public. Once let the entire audience at an opera hear the whole text in English and almost one-half of the works now heard with considerable pleasure would have to be retired from the répertoire because of their utter vapidity, their silliness, their fathomless dramatic stupidity.

The natural answer to this is that such an outcome would be for the everlasting benefit of operatic art. It assuredly would. But let the pleaders for opera in English make no mistake about one thing, and that is that the persons commercially interested in the present state of opera are well aware what would happen if they undertook to revolutionize the conditions surrounding the performances. They will not permit opera to be given exclusively in English.

No impresario who is conversant with the business side of opera in this country is going to consider anything which will deprive him of the services of such singers as Caruso and Destinn. Mme. Destinn does not speak any English. Mr. Caruso speaks only a little. It is not highly probable that either of them would hasten to study the language in order to sing in it. They can do well enough as they are.

Despite all these considerations the artistic reasons for giving operas in English remain incontrovertible. As long as opera is sung in foreign tongues it will continue to be merely a fashionable amusement and will enter into no relations with the daily thought of the people. If it were given in English and thus forced into relations with the thought of the people it would be subjected to radical artistic changes, just as it has been in the countries in which it has been an institution for centuries.

German opera is German because the German people have certain taste in opera. They enjoy the works of composers of other nations, but only in so far as they understand the relation of their music to their text. Germans do not go to the opera, as a rule, merely to hear voices play tunes. If they did they would have better singing.

It is as certain as anything can be that if opera comes to be given in English in this country the conditions surrounding the lyric drama will be entirely changed. And this change will be for the benefit of operatic art and the discomfiture of the social triflers who look upon opera as their particular toy.

But it will be a long time before this consummation is reached. What is needed first of all is a school for singers of opera in English. There is no place now where these singers can acquire a method which will enable them to enunciate English text, and, as has already been asserted, the principal reason for the inability to do this is fundamentally bad delivery in common speech.

There is talk of founding a school for American opera singers. It will be advisable for those who have this project under consideration to bestow much attention on the subject of speech. They will have to teach their singers to speak English before they can teach them to sing it.

It is not at all likely that an institution similar to the Paris Conservatoire can be established here in a year or two. Such an institution is a thing of slow development. But it must be plain to those who watch the doings of the local operatic stage that something like the Paris Conservatoire is sadly needed not only in the United States but also in other countries. The singers who come to us from the Conservatoire know how to walk on and off the stage, how to stand, how to move their hands and arms and legs and how to carry their bodies. Those who come to us from elsewhere usually fail lamentably in some of these matters.

Singers who come to us from the Conservatoire almost invariably have diction. Those who come from elsewhere sometimes have it and more often do not. The Italians too often have no stage methods at all. They depend entirely on their voices. The Germans are too often burdened with stage methods of the vicious variety taught at Bayreuth, where all action is based not upon a survey of Europe's theatrical experience but upon the theories of an extremely narrow minded and ill informed old woman who lives shut up in the little Bavarian town.

In this country there are no settled stage methods. There are as many methods as there are "producing stage managers." There are no traditions as to stage deportment or the conventional actions. There are no standards in the delivery of text. Before opera in English can rise to the dignity of a fine art such matters must be regulated, and if a school is established, it will be found that the speaking of English must be taught in it, and from this discovery the projectors may advance to a realization of the necessity of teaching all the other things which are taught in such an institution as the Paris Conservatoire.

Perhaps some of us may live to see all this. Certainly we have the voices, and while it is unquestionably true that only a moderate percentage of our singers has dramatic temperament and theatrical instincts, it is equally true that the want of these can be supplied in a certain measure by thorough training in stage methods of representation.

W. J. HENDERSON.

NOTES OF MUSIC EVENTS.

Franchetti's opera "Germania," which had its first hearing in America last season, when it was one of the big drawing cards at the Metropolitan Opera House, will be revived next Wednesday evening by General Manager Gatti-Casazza, who is responsible for its hearing in this country. The leading rôles will be taken by the same artists who helped make the opera so popular a year ago: Mme. Destinn as *Rosa*, Mr. Caruso as *Loris*, Mr. Amato as *Worms*, Mr. Pini-Corsi as *Cerugnola* and Mr. Didur as *Stamps*. Among the few newcomers in the cast will be Mme. Gluck as *Jane*, Mr. Hinshaw as *Lutzow* and Mme. Mantouvani as *Queen Louise*. Mr. Toscanini will conduct. The other interesting feature of the week will be the first performance at the Metropolitan of Charpentier's "Louise," which will be presented by the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera Company. It will be the only performance of this opera during the season. The cast will include Miss Mary Garden in the title rôle, Mr. Dalmores as *Julien*, the lover, Mme. Bressler-Glanoff as the *Mother* and Hector Dufranne as the *Father*. Others in the cast will be Edmond Warnery, a new French tenor, Mr. Huberdeau, Mr. Dadul and Mr. Crabbe, and Mmes. Cavan, Domenell, Gianola and Egener. Cleofonte Campanini will conduct. Monday evening "Königskinder" will have another hearing with Miss Farrar, Mr. Jorn, Mme. Homer, Mr. Goritz, Mr. Didur, Miss Wickham and the regular cast. Mr. Hertz will conduct. "Das Rheingold" will be given on Thursday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock as the first performance of the afternoon cycle of "The Ring." Mr. Hertz will conduct. The cast will include Mmes. Aldrich, Gluck, Homer, Sparkes, Allen and Wickham, and Messrs. Burrian, Soomer, Reiss, Hall, Witherspoon, Hinshaw and Ruysdael. "Traviata" will be given Thursday evening with Mmes. Lipkowska, Mauboung and Mattfield and Messrs. Smirnoff, Amato and Rossi. There will be a ballet divertissement with Mme. Torriani as première. "Tristan und Isolde" is billed for Friday evening with Mme. Fremstad and Mr. Burrian in the title rôles. Others in the cast will be Mme. Homer and Messrs. Soomer, Reiss, Hinckley, Hinshaw, Bayer and Hall. Mr. Toscanini will conduct. "The Girl of the Golden West" with the usual cast, including Mme. Destinn and Messrs. Caruso, Amato and Gilly, will be the matinée attraction. "Madama Butterfly" will be given as a special performance for the benefit of the Legal Aid Society on Saturday evening.

Tuesday evening the Metropolitan Opera Company will present "La Bohème" at the Academy of Music, Brooklyn, with a cast including Miss Alice Nielsen and Miss Bella Alten and Messrs. Smirnoff, Scotti, De Segurola, Reschiglian and Pini-Corsi.

At to-night's concert Mme. Lucy Weldt will make her farewell appearance this season, as she is to return to Europe this week to fill engagements already arranged for there. She will sing the "Liebestod" from "Tristan." Others who will sing will be Mmes. Flashaut and Wakefield and Messrs. Amato, Jadlowker, Burrian and Ruysdael.

Alexander Heinemann, the great German lieder singer, will be the soloist at the third concert given by the Volpe Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on Sunday afternoon, February 12. Mr. Heinemann will sing "Archibald Douglas," by Loewe, with orchestral accompaniment, and a group of songs with piano accompaniment. The orchestra will play Schubert's symphony No. 5, B flat major, "The Domain of Hurakan," by Farwell, and Tschaikowsky's ballet suite "The Sleeping Beauty."

The Adele Margulies Trio will give its third and last subscription concert at Mendelssohn Hall on Thursday evening, February 9. A feature of the programme will be a trio by Chevillard, which will be played for the first time. The other numbers will be a sonata by Raff for piano and violin and Schubert's B flat major trio.

The Olive Mead Quartet at its second evening concert in Mendelssohn Hall on Wednesday, February 1, will give the following programme:

Quartet in E flat, opus 12 ..... Mendelssohn
Duet in G major, violin and viola ..... Mozart
Quartet in A major, opus 41, No. 3 ..... Schumann

Mme. Gadski will appear at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this afternoon as soloist of the New York Philharmonic Society, under Mahler, in a Wagner programme which completes the Brooklyn subscription series and will be the last of the Gadski-Wagner Philharmonic concerts. She will sing *Elsa's* dream from "Lohengrin," *Elisabeth's* aria from "Tannhäuser" and the immolation scene from "Götterdämmerung." The orchestra will play the Rienzi overture, the prelude to "Lohengrin," the funeral march from "Götterdämmerung" and the overture of "Tannhäuser." The Philharmonic Society in Carnegie Hall Tuesday evening and Friday afternoon will offer the Schumann symphony in E flat, called "The Rhenish," the "Melusine" overture of Mendelssohn, the prelude to "Lohengrin" and Bizet's suite "Roma," which ends with the brilliant Roman carnival. As a result of the success of the series of five concerts just concluded it has been decided to offer another cycle within the regular series, beginning with the pair of concerts February 14 and 17, when Mme. Kirkby-Lunn, the English contralto, will be soloist in an English-American programme. On February 21 and 24 the soloist will be Ernest Consolo, pianist, and the programme entirely Italian. The third pair, March 7 and 10, will be a living composers programme, with Maud Powell, violinist, soloist. A Norse-Slavic programme will be offered March 14 and 17, with George Hamlin, tenor, soloist, and the cycle and the season will close simultaneously March 21 and 24, with Mme. Schumann-Heink, soloist, in an all German programme.

Adele Krueger, soprano, who recently gave her first song recital in New York, will appear in joint recital with Adolphe Borchard, the French pianist, in Mendelssohn Hall on Tuesday afternoon, February 21, at 2:30 o'clock. The programme will embrace compositions for both voice and piano of a widely varied character and will contain much from the school of modern French compositions.

The fourth concert of the Russian Symphony Orchestra, Modest Altschuler conductor, will be given Thursday evening, February 2, in Carnegie Hall. In addition to a first time orchestral work, the orchestral management will offer as soloist the young Canadian violinist, Kathleen Parlow, who is to play the Wieniawski D minor concerto for violin. The programme in full is as follows:

Finnish Rhapsody (First time) ..... Kavanis
"The Cliff" ..... Rachmaninoff
Concerto for violin, D minor ..... Wieniawski
Miss Kathleen Parlow
Symphony No. 4, E minor ..... Tschaikowsky

The third and last concert of the Marum Quartet will be given on Monday night, and not as usual on Thursday evening, at Cooper Union. The quartet will be assisted on this occasion by Yolanda Mero, the pianist, Josef Kovarik, viola, and Bernhard Ulrichter, violoncellist. Ludwig Marum has arranged a programme which includes some rarely heard chamber music, which is certain to interest lovers of concerts of this character. The programme will close with Tschaikowsky's sextet in D minor, the so called "Souvenir de Florence," for two violins, two violas and two 'cellos. Other numbers on the programme are Mozart's quartet in D major and Smetana's trio in G minor for piano, violin and 'cello.

In the next four concerts which the Symphony Society of New York will give, Walter Damrosch will carry out his idea of presenting a cycle of works by modern French composers. In order, however, to avoid a preponderance of this music, which will include symphonies by Paul Dukas, Ernest Chausson and others, the programmes will also include compositions by Weber, Bach, Tschaikowsky and other composers of different schools. The first programme, to be given next Sunday afternoon in the New Theatre, will include Dukas's symphony in C major. This composer up to now is known in New York only through his orchestral scherzo "L'Apprenti Sorcier." Presently his lyric drama "Ariane et Barbe Bleue" will be given here. His symphony has only three movements and has other characteristics which differentiate it from other works in this form. The programme will also include César Franck's "Variations Symphoniques" for piano and orchestra. Although Franck is no longer living he had the greatest influence on the modern French school. He is frequently referred to as the "French Bach," and so a concerto by Bach on this programme is not unapropos. The pianist will be Adolphe Borchard.

The first concert of the series of historical piano recitals announced by Sigismond Stojowski will be given at Mendelssohn Hall on Saturday afternoon, February 4, at 2:30. The programme will be devoted to the works of German, French and Italian masters of the clavichord and of the polyphonic form in the following comprehensive programme, which is of general attraction as well as of special interest to the student:

Suite in D minor ..... G. F. Handel
Sonata in A major ..... Pietro Domenico Paradisi
Les Roseaux
Les Barricades Mystérieuses ..... François Couperin
Le Coucou ..... Claude Daquin
Pastorale
Capriccio ..... Domenico Scarlatti
Gavotte Variée ..... Jean Philippe Rameau
Bourrées from English suite in A major; Sarabande from French suite in D minor; gigue from first Partita; chromatic fantasy and fugue ..... J. S. Bach

This evening Clara and David Mannes will play for the first time at their concerts at the Belasco Theatre the Schubert Rondo Brilliante. By request Mr. and Mrs. Mannes have added the Mozart sonata in D major to their programme, which, beginning with the Bach A major sonata and ending with the greatest of Brahms's three sonatas, the one in D minor, op. 108, will offer unusual variety and interest.

The fourth concert of the regular series of six subscription concerts of the Kneisel Quartet will be given on Tuesday evening, February 7. Arthur Whiting will be the assisting artist in the Brahms piano quintet and William Wilcke will play a Bach sonata. The complete programme follows:

Quartet in C sharp minor, op. 131 ..... Beethoven
Sonata in D major ..... Bach
For violoncello alone.
Quartet in A major, op. 26 ..... Brahms
For pianoforte, violin, viola and violoncello.

The Barrère Ensemble will give its third and last concert of chamber music for wind instruments this season at the Belasco Theatre on Monday afternoon, February 6, at 3:30. In addition to compositions by Schubert and Saint-Saëns an interesting feature of the programme is a suite in B flat by Richard Strauss, written for thirteen instruments. This will be the first performance in America of the suite, which is still in manuscript. Another novelty is "Aquarelles Hollandais," by Christian Kriens, which also has its first performance on this occasion. As the name indicates, the music is reminiscent of Holland throughout the three movements. In the first, "La Cathédrale," an unusual effect as of bells is given by the blending of tones. The second movement is a Dutch lullaby and the third takes an old Dutch folksong, "Piet Hein," dating back to the days of the war between Spain and Holland and the rise of the Dutch Republic, and embroiders it with variations. Piet Hein, a popular favorite in Dutch tradition, was a cobbler who left his bench in a cellar when the war broke out and by deeds of extraordinary bravery became an Admiral. The composition is written for ten instruments and will be performed for the first time in Paris in February by La Société Moderne d'Instruments à Vent, founded by George Barrère sixteen years ago.

The third concert of the People's Symphony Society will take place at Carnegie Hall this afternoon. The programme:

Overture, "Merry Wives of Windsor" ..... Nicolai
Fifth symphony ..... Beethoven
Piano concerto, G minor ..... Saint-Saëns
Lucia Hartley.
Prelude to Act II, "Königskinder" ..... Humperdinck

Mary Reno Pinney will give a concert of organ, piano and vocal music at Mendelssohn Hall on Saturday at 8:30 P. M. She will be aided by David Bispham.

Ferruccio Busoni will give his second piano recital at Carnegie Hall on Saturday afternoon at 2:30. The programme:

Beethoven—15 variations and fugue on the theme of the "Eroica." Opus 55
Chopin—6 Etudes ..... Opus 25
Chopin—Impromptu, F sharp major ..... Opus 36
Scherzo, C sharp minor ..... Opus 39
Nocturne, C minor ..... Opus 48
Polonaise, A flat major ..... Opus 53
Schubert-Liszt—Der Erlkönig
Liszt—Galop Chromatique.

The first piano recital of the season of Cecile Behrens will be held in Mendelssohn Hall on Friday evening, February 10, when she will be assisted by Leo Schulz, 'cellist.

Names in Siam.

From the Christian Herald.

The late King of Siam had for a fullname Phra Bat Somdeth Phra Paramindr Maha Chulilongkorn Phra Chula Chum Klot how Yu Hua, and this does not include his titles. A wag in Bombay saw it in the paper when the ruler was visiting that city and was being received by the British officials and passed it over to a young Irish subaltern with the challenge that he pronounce it. The young fellow looked at it a moment and then handed it back. He said he was not long enough winded, but he was sure he could play it on the garrison club piano if the instrument were a couple of octaves longer.

The King's uncle, however, who was also a Prince high priest, had for one name alone the following collection of letters: Pawaratsawariyalongkaulu. Any one who can get through this and not flat out of the notes has lived a long time where he can look out of the window and see the gilded peak of a wat or temple shimmering in the equatorial sun.

Old Hunter's Ambition.

From the Pittsburg Dispatch.

A unique character, whose life in many respects was a parallel to that of Cooper's famous Leatherstocking, passed away yesterday when James Stephenson died in the house in Summit township, Washington county, where he was born seventy-four years ago. He never left his home without his old rifle and hunting was a mania with him. Early in life he formed an ambition to find 100 bee trees before he died. He found his ninety-ninth tree several weeks ago and before he succumbed to heart failure he was trying to locate the tree that would crown his record.

Stephenson was a pioneer of Washington county. His father was born in Berkeley county, Virginia, on a plantation adjoining that of George Washington. The elder Stephenson and George Washington were friends.

Saying the Right Thing.

From the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

"I don't seem to be able to say the right thing to women," a bashful young man confided to us the other day, "and that's why I don't shine in society. I'll tell you an instance of it. Not long ago I met a woman I hadn't seen for years and I could see that she was trying to keep young. So I thought I'd say a graceful thing to her.

"'You carry your age remarkably well,' says I.

"Well, the moment I said it I could see that I was in wrong. She was looking chilly and getting red, so I said:

"'Don't mind my little jokes. I never mean what I say. As a matter of fact you don't carry your age a bit well.'

"And then she killed me with a haughty look and sailed away without saying good-by. Say, how should I have put it?"

A Lucky Cougar Hunter.

Libby correspondence Spokane Herald.

C. E. Ordish returned to Libby Monday from a lion hunt on Pipe Creek and brought with him the hides of three fine lions with the heads attached. Mr. Ordish has a bet with C. C. Cobb of Kalispell that he will send him twenty lion hides this winter.

So far Mr. Ordish has sent in eleven hides and says that he has all kinds of time to spare and as many more lions in sight. During the last four years he states that he has captured and killed with two dogs seventy-four lions. On this last hunt Mr. Ordish had lassoed one of the animals that had been treed, but it chewed the lariat in two and had to be shot.

Maine Man Kills Black Fox.

From the Lewiston Journal.

George L. Worthley of Norridgewock shot a black fox Tuesday, which is estimated to be worth from $250 to $500. Mr. Worthley thought he was on the trail of a red fox.

He had set his Kentucky fox hound on a scent and in a few minutes after the dog had made a circuit of several miles the fox ran up close to where Mr. Worthley was on the watch. It took but one shot to kill the animal. This is the sixth black fox that has been killed or captured in Norridgewock this season. Three of them have been captured and are still alive.

Poker Playing by Machinery.

From the Chicago Tribune.

Application for a peculiar patent recently has been recorded. It is no less a device than a poker playing machine.

It deals the cards, discards for you and draws to your hand. It throws the cards back and shuffles for a new deal by the mere pressure of an electric button. Beyond the fact that the machine is a drumlike cylinder upon the head of which the cards are arranged little is known of the mechanism.

GUSTAV AMBERG LOOKS BACK

AT THE PAST GLORIES OF THE GERMAN THEATRE HERE.

No More Stars Like Those He Used to Bring Over—Triumphs of the Thalia and the Irving Place—Why He Thinks They Cannot Be Repeated—His Start.

The foyer and the façade of the Garden Theatre are covered with posters showing the famous German actor Ernst von Possart in his various rôles. The Irving Place Theatre is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the German Empire by a series of classical plays. Altogether there seems to be a revival of interest in the German theatre. Nevertheless Gustav Amberg, who first brought Possart to New York thirty years ago, shakes his head as he discusses the future of German drama in New York and elsewhere in America.

"I believe that a German theatre as such can be run successfully here in New York, and I take New York as typical of the other large cities in the United States, not more than three months in the year," he says. "One of the reasons for this is that the German population is scattered now; it is no longer focussed about this locality as it once was, and the American born Germans prefer the American drama except when there is some great star, like Von Possart, to be seen.

"There are no more stars like those I have brought over, including Marie Geistinger, Agnes Sorma, Ludwig Barnay, Adolph Sonnenthal, Adelaide Ristori, Joseph Kainz, August Junkermann, Adalbert Matkowsky, Hermine Claar-Della, Georg Engel, Frederick Bonn. Geistinger died four years ago. The other day in Austria Joseph Kainz passed on one of the brightest ornaments of the German stage; Engel was lost to us last year.

"The lesser stars of to-day do not draw; their work is not big enough, their names not well enough known to American audiences. American gold scattered over Germany makes the competition bitterly keen. Just as soon as a good musical comedy appears or an interesting play it is caught up and the American rendition attracts the German theatregoers because they can see it better staged and produced in the Broadway playhouses.

"With the passing of Possart I believe passes the last hold the German theatre has on the public attention, and this may be his final appearance in America, for he comes now only by permission of the Prince Regent of Bavaria. He has retired from active work on the German stage, occupying over there a position for which I think we have no exact parallel in America, that of intendant, appearing only twice a year at benefits and lecturing now and then on the drama and kindred subjects.

"Agnes Sorma was successful in bringing back to the Irving Place Theatre many of the one time habitués who had wandered away, but Sorma is now over 50 and the American and the German-American people do not care for mature stars."

"A Bernhardt?" is mentioned tentatively and the name recalls one of the many interesting reminiscences of Mr. Amberg's managerial career.

"The greatest feminine star I ever had under my management was Marie Geistinger, and when Bernhardt first came to America they appeared the same night as *Camille*, each drawing a tremendous house and tremendous applause. The papers the next morning headlined the two as 'Bernhardt-Geistinger' or was it 'Geistinger-Bernhardt'?—I forget. It looked like the announcement of a horse race, the favorites coming in neck and neck.

"There has been a great deal written about the wonder of this last appearance of Bernhardt at 67 and it was great, but Geistinger, after a retirement of ten years from the stage, came back here at the age of 61 and played with all her old time vigor in 'Theresa Krones,' 'Three Pair of Shoes,' 'The Bet,' 'Castles in the Air' and several other former successes. Her voice still retained its old time power, her memory was perfect, her charm as insistent as ever.

"She was, like the majority of the German players, very versatile; a soubrette one night, a tragedy queen the next. I have seen her in the five years she was under my management play *Camille* in the afternoon and *Boccaccio* in the evening, and *Marie Stuart* followed by *Rosalinde* in 'The Bet.' August Junkermann had an enormous répertoire. Mitterwurzer played comedy and tragedy equally well, having a répertoire of from seventy-five to a hundred parts. Frederick Bonn, who was most successful at his first appearance at the Irving Place Theatre but fell down heavily the two following seasons he came over, had a list equally long and arduous.

"The most successful season I ever had as manager of a German theatre was at the old Thalia thirty years ago. The Thalia was then a very fashionable playhouse, and Possart in his prime was my big star. August Belmont, Sr., once said to me that he was going to sue me for damages, for his people insisted on his horses being taken out two or three times a week to bring them down to my playhouse there were, of course, no autos in those days. Jay Gould used to bring parties of forty or fifty. Gen. Cutting was a constant patron and brought his friends, as did Gen. Dan Sickles.

"The Atlantic Garden, then in fashion, was filled after the Thalia closed with merry parties of a dozen and more, for big theatre parties were more the style then than they are now. Possart that year played some of the rôles he appears in now, but his répertoire was considerably larger. He was by turns *Iago* to Ludwig Barnay's *Othello*, *Faust* to his *Mephisto*; he was *Shylock* too, and in spite of the passing of the years I can see no abating of his vigor in that wonderful rôle to-day.

"When I opened the then Amberg Theatre it was considered quite ahead of the times and ranked with the newest and best playhouses. This was in December, 1888, nine years approximately after the Thalia's big success which I have just spoken of. I had at the Amberg that season a stock company of 120, and in addition to dramatic stars, some of whom I have mentioned, Karl Streitman, the Viennese tenor, and Adolph Philip were musical favorites.

"The first American performances of Ibsen's 'The Pillars of Society' and of Sudermann's 'Magda' were given here. Several of the operettas, 'The Merry War,' 'Gypsy Baron' and other Strauss favorites were given first at the Thalia, then at the Amberg, their summer premières being made at Terrace Garden under my supervision.

"About eighteen years ago at the Amberg I brought out the Bavarian players. They made a great success, and after them I brought out the Schliersee peasant actors, who followed their work at the Amberg by a two months engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House, then under the management of Messrs. Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau.

"When I finished my career as active manager at the Irving Place Theatre, as it was then called, I was succeeded by Herr Conried. He was followed by Mr. Luchow and then by Mr. Weil, who is now connected with the Metropolitan Opera House. After that in turn came Messrs. Bergarth and Stein, and at present Mr. Bergarth is carrying on the work alone. My connection with the German theatres is purely nominal at present, except during the Possart revival. For a good many years I have been in Germany for the Shubert management.

"I visited America first as a young boy intending to enter a business house, or at least take a book about. I did not come of a theatrical family and my knowledge of the playhouse was extremely limited. I could play the piano more than fairly well, and some manager hearing me one night at a little party induced me to make a professional appearance. If it did not launch me on the world as a forerunner of Hofmann and other child prodigies, it gave me a taste for the theatre which determined my choice of a profession.

"My first venture was with a road company of four players. I was the manager, cashier, advance agent, box office man, orchestra, prompter. I only played once, in a one act piece entitled, 'You Shall Not Paint the Devil on the Tail.' I did not like it, neither did the audience and I never repeated my offence. Our little company went through Wisconsin, playing at all the big and little places, for there was a large German population to draw on and we were very successful.

"The only American star I ever took to the other side was Lillian Russell. This was ten or a dozen years ago at least. She was widely advertised as the most beautiful woman in America. I paid her $250 a night and all her expenses. When we reached Leipsic the theatre was closed and the production off on account of the death of the Empress of Austria. I had ordered some specially effective posters for which I paid a large sum. This went into the debit side of the account, as they could not be used elsewhere.

"Several years after that, happening to be in Leipsic again I wandered into a kind of Coney Island place on the outskirts and listened to a German barker inviting the crowds to step inside and see the most beautiful woman in America. The charge for this privilege was ten pfennigs. I cheerfully paid my little coin to satisfy my curiosity and once within was met by the sight of one of those very posters, placed conspicuously with a strong light on the face. This was 'the most beautiful woman,' but the crowd did not object and I understand the management made money out of the portrait. I am glad somebody did."

CANADA FARMER'S ONE FEAR.

Danger of Exhausting the Rich Soil Too Fast.

LONDON, Ont., Jan. 15. Twenty-five years ago, it is safe to say, a great majority of the farmers in the Province of Ontario were encumbered by mortgages and there was a rush of young people from the country to the towns and cities of Canada and across the border to the United States. To-day there is scarcely a farm mortgaged and the young men and women are content to remain at home and share in the marvellous prosperity which has come to all sections of Canada, but particularly to the furthest west and to the western peninsula of Ontario, where such calamities as crop failures and droughts are unknown.

Many of those who went to the cities of the United States are returning to the land of their birth, and they are not returning alone, as statistics testify, for more than 200,000 home seekers passed the Canadian border during the last twelve months. The farmers of the Dakotas, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and other Western States have come by the thousand, having sold their corn lands for prices that enabled them to purchase double the territory in the Canadian wheat growing belt and leave a handsome balance to be placed in the bank on making their destination.

The farmer of the Northwest talks wheat, thinks wheat and dreams of that cereal when he goes to bed. He sows it on a big scale by thousands of acres in some localities and in the cultivation and harvesting of his crops he uses the latest inventions.

Times have changed since the days of the cradle and the wooden hand rake and there are no stumps where the grain had to be hoed about the roots as in the pioneer days of Ontario and Quebec. Instead are broad acres of virgin prairie soil over which have roamed countless herds of buffalo and other animals enriching for centuries a soil already full of the germs of promise. Great gang ploughs drawn by traction engines cut deep furrows, a swath eight or ten feet wide, and some of the ploughs have harrows of the disk pattern attached which pulverize the seed bed and make it ready for the planting. It is all over quickly and when the grain nods in the breeze at harvesting time the reaping and threshing machine combined is drawn by a score of horses and the wheat is left in the fields in bags to be drawn to the nearest railroad station, where it is graded at the elevator, paid for at the current market prices and held ready to be put into the cars and sent to all corners of the world.

The only fly in the Northwestern farmer's ointment comes in the warning that he is taking everything and giving nothing. The natural fertility of the land will become exhausted unless a change is made from present conditions. The straw which is burned in the fields should be converted into manure and other artificial aids should be given to the soil. Failing this a deterioration in the return an acre is in sight and indeed in some of the older sections of the Northwest has already arrived. There are many progressive men in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan and movements looking to the conservation of the wheat lands are under way. The money has come so quickly and so easily that many have become careless. The failure of the crop in two or three districts the past season has brought a realization that frost and drought are evils to be reckoned with and there is an indication that in some localities there will be a diversity of crops where hitherto wheat alone has been grown.

Here in Ontario, and especially in the vicinity of London, where the farming is diversified, the tiller of the soil sticks to some of the methods of his father and his grandfather. He uses as a rule the old fashioned hand plough and finds it comes up to the requirements of his needs. Most of the farms are of 100 acres and not many individuals till more than that area, though here and there you can find a man who may have treble that amount of land under the highest state of cultivation. Generally such a farmer has sons who are associated with him in the work.

Originally every one of these farms was part of a forest of maple, oak, beech, hickory, birch, elm, butternut, walnut, cherry, ash, cedar, pine, poplar, hemlock, spruce or basswood, according to the location, the ridges being covered with valuable growths of hard wood. The men who came by boat to Toronto and Hamilton in the early days, waited for the advent of winter and drove hundreds of miles over the snow in their rude sleighs in search of home sites, were hardy and courageous. The giants of the forests were felled and a log cabin was built in the midst of the first opening won from the wilderness. Old settlers will tell you that the deer came to browse on the tree tops. Bears threatened the live stock and wolves howled dismally. The woods were filled with game and the streams teemed with fish. When spring came grain was sown among the stumps, the timber and brush having been burned, and step by step acre after acre was brought to a state of cultivation.

To-day there is the merest fringe of timber, and the farmer, the grandson and great-grandson of the pioneer, is husbanding his wood. There was a time when the "down" trees, those blown prostrate by the gales of winter, were left to rot and the axe sought only the soundness of the standing trees for fuel. Millions of dollars worth of timber was abandoned thus, and it is only when the farmer is face to face with the fact that fuel is money that he has awakened to the benefits of conservation. Every dead tree is cut up, and the tops are cleaned to the last twig. Wire is taking the place of timber for fencing, and if the early settler could only return for a brief visit he would marvel at the change in the country his industry and courage helped to win.

The hogs which he butchered and brought to the nearby market he was glad to dispose of for $3.25 to $3.75 a hundred. To-day they bring $12.50. The hay for which $6 a ton was considered a good price has sold up to $18 and is to-day $12.50, and if it isn't a good quality of timothy or a mixture of timothy and alsike don't bring it to market, for nobody will buy it. Eggs were dirt cheap at 10 and 12 cents a dozen. To-day they are 35 to 40 cents. Butter as golden as the dandelion and as sweet as a nut was for years 10 to 12 cents. To-day in any Canadian market the best grade brings 30 to 35 cents. The primest fat chickens were 50 cents a pair, and any cut of beef, mutton or lamb sold at prices that would make the cost of living seem far from the problem it is now.

As has been said, mortgages were the bugbear of the farmer some years ago and even the thriftiest had one to raise. Now there is a change. The average farmer lives in a brick house, and his back barn with foundation of concrete, brick or stone is warm and snug. He has more land under grazing and rears the blooded cattle, hogs and sheep which bring the money. The feed for his cattle in winter is cut by machinery, there is water in every stall, and taking care of the young things is play in comparison with what it was twenty-five years ago. The houses have water throughout, many have bathtubs, and where there is no piano or organ there is a melodeon or a phonograph to beguile the evening hours. He takes a daily paper or certainly some good weekly, and the telephone in many districts is at his hand to communicate with the neighbors or with the nearest town. The farmers of a community keep in touch with each other right along by phone, and any change in market conditions is speedily spread. There was a time when it was imperative for the tiller of the soil to get his products to market as soon as possible, for there was the interest on the mortgage coming due or the lightning rod man's note had to be met. Prices cut no figure then, but to-day Mr. Farmer's granaries