

CONTRASTS IN THE PLAYS OF A WEEK

Varieties in Local Color and Characters in Three Plays.

LONDON AND HAWAIIAN LIFE

The Irreconcilable Differences of the Jews and Catholics in Paris Society.

There is wisdom in the opinion of Henry Arthur Jones that American theatregoers are more interested in their own people on the stage than any other nationality. There is more simplicity and more truth in this utterance of the author of "The Silver King" and "The Lure" than in some of his more solemn opinions on the subject of the theatre. The native managers who realized its truth have profited long ago by their foresight. Other conditions being equal American plays stand a much greater chance of prosperity before our public than those of any other nationality. Mr. Jones only repeated what has become a business principle with all managers who are not hopelessly prejudiced by the length of a run in London or Paris, where the conditions seem to grow more and more different every day. It is to depart from the question, the persistent importation of plays of London life that has finally emptied the galleries of the New York theatres. It did not take a discerning New York manager long to discover that the dramatists of the day in England are writing only for the stalls or most expensive places in the playhouse. They have ignored the pit. Incidentally they have made no effort to interest that part of the theatregoing public which used to sit in the galleries of the New York theatres. This digression may be valuable in emphasizing the prevailing preference of theatregoers for plays of a life and a country that they understand.

It is not of course possible to say whether or not they prefer the place of native life to another. Dramas of social customs in this country are now more or less under the ban of American managers. They are fond of saying that the public is weary of the villain in the dress suit and the inevitable third act which has for so many years been seen in either one or two forms. It was not long ago that the curtain on revealing the third act also set in motion some musical force which played with much more feeling than accuracy "Le Reve apres le Bal," which was in these days the expression of the stage manager's idea of diversion among the socially elevated. Advanced and courageous playwrights of the local drama used to place this third act, which alternated with the bathroom, in the apartments of the villain, who having exchanged evening dress for a silk dressing gown or a wadded smoking jacket was prepared to wreck the reputation of some perfectly honest but imprudent married lady who was unwisely seeking him out in his lair. It is not surprising that the public wearied of the perennial appearance of these two episodes in all drama that pretended to depict society in any of its phases.

Yet the managers who regard plays of our social life with such distrust know, if they know anything about their profession, that the medium in which a play is exhibited bears no essential relation to its success. It may or may not prove of incidental value to the drama, but if there are the elements of vitality or lasting success in the work itself its medium could never destroy the effect of these qualities.

But the value of an interesting milieu is not to be denied. To preserve the local essence and yet interest the hearers in the scene of his play is an achievement for any dramatist. To keep their native characters in the foreground and yet place them against a scene that will serve as an additional element of attraction to the audience is an event for which many dramatists struggle but which few are successful in attaining. So R. W. Tully, who wrote "The Bird of Paradise," has every reason to be happy at the successful blend of comprehensible and familiar life in his principal characters and the beautifully picturesque and romantic atmosphere of his play. If it is weak

on the dramatic side that fault is to be found chiefly in its diffuseness. At the first performance on Monday the action was halted persistently during the scene that began the third act by some negotiations that appeared to be taking place between the degenerate hero and the supervisor of the sugar plantation. Just what these business matters were is not important, nor was it evident to the audience what they signified in the progress of the story or the development of the character of the principal figures in the play.

It seemed to the audience that there was only one purpose for that attractive episode in which the piazza of a club is made the scene of a dinner party with the candles burning on the table and the lanterns illuminating the space not lit by the moonlight, which was more fully revealed in the background, playing over the surface of a very natural and beautiful piece of water. This contrast between the Hawaiian heroine in her modish evening gown and the women about her showed plainly that there could never be any happiness between her and her American lover. She was to return to her own people, and as she still loved him with almost the same passion as ever it was to be a tragic parting for her. He was indifferent. So the single duty of the playwright in this scene was to show that there was nothing in the world for those two but separation and the diverse consequences parting would bring to the trusting little savage and the selfish and disillusioned husband. It is small wonder, therefore, that the scene with all the additional intrigue crowded into it proved a serious delay to the progress of the play. Then there are excessive minutes in the second act, although their effect is less vital.

With this regret at his lack of completely successful use of his dramatic material criticism of Mr. Tully's play must end. It possesses in an unusual degree most of the qualities that are lacking in two-thirds of the plays that come before the public to-day. The story of the American who fell into a decadence of his mental and spiritual forces through the influence of a life of the senses under a tropical sky is only half of the thesis of the author. The regeneration of a human derelict through the influence of a woman such as he has rarely seen in his later years was the natural and appealing contrast to what had taken place in the life of the other. Nobody need take seriously the theories of the drama, for men may go to Hawaii and escape any of the perils of its natural conditions which Mr. Tully has accepted as inevitable, since they are the elements from which the thesis of his play is built. But this is no more than the license of the playwright, and for the selection of a locality of such rare color and fascination, for such glowing vistas of nature in her grandest dress as well as for the obligation of native music and dancing that accompanies the languorous progress of the play for these material episodes of "The Bird of Paradise" there should be only gratitude.

Here is complete novelty in scene and feeling. It is novelty, moreover, of a fascinating kind. There is strength in the dramatic element of the story which even the occasional ineptness of Mr. Tully cannot obscure, and it should encourage American dramatists that there exists in our country such latitudes of nature as to make it possible to call "The Bird of Paradise" an American play.

In the other dramas of the week the importance that correspondence plays in the happiness of married life was significantly revealed. If Mme. Simone had not most carelessly left behind her a sac a main containing a very ardent love letter written to her by Arnold Daly there would have been no starting point for "The Return to Jerusalem." As it was, the play is no more than an episode of love, since it ends with the return of the Christian lover to the arms of his wife. What happens to the Jewish heroine is not made so clear. She may be relied upon, however, to fix herself comfortably in life. Not only as a woman of intellect but as a woman of heart she had contrived during her previous life to get what she wanted. In order to wear a title she became a Christian.

In order to fill out her emotional life she took another woman's husband. So it is not probable that the heroine of "The Return to Jerusalem" will ever lack for what she wants. Even the loss of the gold handbag brought her fortune, since she was in this way thrown into the life of the somewhat uncertain lover who was rather sure that he was fond of her but did not know whether or not he wanted to make her a substitute for his wife. So the heroine of Maurice Donnay's play passes from the view of the spectators, leaving them, in their

Some English Players That Are Liked in This Country

Whenever there is a season that falls below the average in prosperity managers and actors look about them for some explanation of the public's indifference to what they have to offer. The managers have so far failed to make any declaration as to the cause of their disappointments during the present season. That their plays are poor is the last thing they would ever admit.

The actors, however, under such circumstances always turn to one way of explaining their difficulties in getting engagements. They point to the English actor as their rival. They declare that the constant importation of English actors to this country adds its numbers to an already overcrowded profession and makes the lot of the native actor still more difficult.

This is of course not a new question. Leater Wallack in the years he controlled the most fashionable theatre in New York always imported his actors as well as a number of the women in his company from England. He was in the habit of saying that American actors of that day were incapable of giving any illusion of fashionable life to the roles in which they appeared. Neither in dress, speech nor movement could they conform to the ideas of fashionable life which he had established as the model in his theatre. Few American plays were at that time acted by his company, so there may have been more or less propriety in his selection of English actors. More important were the earlier rivalries between Macready and Forrest, which became a part of history in New York.

So there is always the complaint of the American actor that his colleagues in London come here and occupy in the favor of the public the place which should in reality be his. This cry grows more poignant in such a season as this. There have been many plays produced which are failures and many actors after weeks of rehearsal have found themselves employed profitably for only a short time.

Between engagements there are inevitable weeks of idleness, which use up profits and are an ordeal to the less successful players. It is natural that they should regard with some resentment the successful visitations of English players to this country. It has happened, moreover, that a number of them have attained positions on the American stage which they never possessed at home.

The advantages of American popularity to the English actor are so great that he rarely goes back to his own country once he is established here in the favor of the public. There are numerous instances of this kind. Robert Mantell, William Faversham, J. E. Dodson, George Arliss—these are some of the actors who never returned to their own country once they had succeeded in gaining a foothold here.

They occupy, moreover, much more exalted positions in this country than they ever did before. Charles Coghlan, Kyle Bellow and Frank Worthing spent their lives and died in this country, where they had found it much more profitable to remain in life than to return to their land, which had never shown them the same appreciation.

There are not only greater financial rewards in this country, because the salaries are much higher and the seasons longer than they are abroad, but there are also greater opportunities to gain artistic importance. Managers are so eager to create stars out of any material that offers that they will promote to that position the actor showing any trace of unusual talent or personality.

This may happen to an English actor who has been in this country only for a few seasons, whereas in his own country he would be compelled to wait for years before such an honor was bestowed on him. Then the London theatres, which really give the tone to all English theatricals, just as the New York theatres do to the stage in America, are very largely controlled by actor managers. Naturally an actor stands no chance under such circumstances of being a star or getting to the top. Such conditions do not prevail in this country.

Many English actors who have found both fame and fortune in this country have often been obscure in their own. Ethel Wynne Matthison was not even playing in a regular dramatic company when she came here under Ben Greet's management and acted with such great success in "Everyman" that she has never been allowed to leave this country, much to the gain of the American stage. Lawrence D'Orsay was an obscure actor in the British provinces when he was brought here to act in "The Shop Girl." Augustus Thomas realized his fitness to play an English nobleman of a certain type and wrote "The Earl of Pawtucket."

So not only is the artistic path of the English actor easier in this country, but his engagements are much longer and thus, his material compensation is also greater, whatever he may say about the greater expenses of living here. An engagement for eight weeks is considered a long one in England, whereas from thirty to forty weeks may be counted on by any successful American actor.

So the English immigration seems likely to continue and it cannot be said that any harm is likely to result to the stage from this fact. American audiences are quite indifferent to the nationality of the players that amuse them or are efficient and competent in their line. It really seems as if the question of the English actor's importance in this country is no more vital than it was forty years ago, when it first began to be talked about by our players of native birth.

Mrs. Stannard's First Success.

From the Westminster Gazette.
It is interesting to learn now that the late Mrs. Stannard, otherwise "John Strange Winter," once described herself as a woman writer but not a "woman's righter." Yet there was certainly no lack of character or brain power about the author of "Bootsie's Baby," who was indeed an eminently capable woman with a clear, well balanced intellect, much robust common sense, and a great capacity for organization, which served her in good stead when she turned from literature to commerce.

Struggling authors may be interested to know that it was only after ten years of incessant work that Mrs. Stannard, who lived to write something like one hundred books, scored her first real success. And even this might not have been achieved but for a little piece of luck, for "Bootsie's Baby," the work in question, had then been rejected by six London publishers and cast aside as hopeless. Mrs. Stannard's husband, however, happened to pick up the manuscript one day, read it, liked it, and suggested that he should send it to the *Graphic*. Mrs. Stannard answered: "Send it anywhere you like," and no one was more astonished than herself when in due course the *Graphic* took it.



MAUDIE TITHERADGE IN "THE BUTTERFLY ON THE WHEEL."



LEWIS WALLER IN "THE GARDEN OF ALLAH," CENTURY THEATRE.

knowledge that she will be perfectly able to take care of her future, rather cold. It does not lie in nature to love or sympathize deeply with women so obviously capable of looking after themselves.

It was an anonymous letter that led to the breaking of the poor little butterfly on the legal wheel. An unsigned note told the husband of the heroine of "The Butterfly on the Wheel" that his wife was deliberately planning to pass a night in Paris with the man devoted to her. It was afterward developed that the writer was the jealous woman whom this lover had rejected in favor of the innocent butterfly. But it took an extract to prove this rather unimportant fact.

The author of "The Bird of Paradise" earned the gratitude of his audience on Monday by carrying the dramatic interest of the story up to the end of the last scene. That old-fashioned formula which wound up the act at the end of the third act with only some odds and ends of the action to be finished up is a method of the past. The progress of "The Butterfly on the Wheel" would have come to a much more striking climax had the lawyer forgiven his wife in the court room after her demoniac had proved to all but the counsel for this suspicious husband that she was innocent of any real wrong. Instead of that direct climax the author dawdled an act over the identity of the letter writer, about whom nobody cared particularly. But it must not be thought for this reason that letters are not important in preserving the lucidness of Jones.



GEORGE RELPH IN "KISMET."



Photo by Mishkin. CONSTANCE COLLIER.



PAM ELA GAYTHORNE IN "THE BIRD OF PARADISE."



LYN HARDING WITH GRACE GEORGE.



Photo by Mishkin. ETHEL WYNNE MATTHISON.