Wide Field of the American Play-Wright.

Mary Nash in "The Women"

Dolly Madison and Her Negro Maid

The First act of "The Bird of Paradise"

The three Women in "The Talker"

The American dramatist used to bemoan the lack of picturesque opportunity which the life of this country afforded him. No military, no titled aristocracy, no outward and visible signs of the inward greatness of our existence. Even the classifications of life in foreign countries simplified the task of any dramatist. To call a man "Commerzienrath" in a German drama fixes him in the social hierarchy as accurately as to describe any Frenchman in a drama of his land as a "rentier." Both are men well situated in regard to this world's goods and more or less esteemed in their community. Yet there is no single word in the English language which so epitomizes the characteristics of a human creature in our society.

Then there was the invariable lack of picturesqueness.

"Take away the Indians," these dramatists would say, "and what else is left to us for color and brilliancy? In our army there is little interest on the part of our people for some reason that nobody seems to understand, possibly because its external aspects are not so alluring as the armies of European nations. So where is the native playwright to find his variety?"

There could be no better answer to this inquiry, rhetorical as it may seem, than the four views of dramas offered here. One shows a scene on the Island of Puna in the Hawaiian group. This play is American, in that its principal interest lies in the fate of the Americans on the island, as well as in the lives and customs of the natives which are exhibited in the different acts. They all have their bearing on the dramatic interest of the drama.

"The Bird of Paradise," which contains these highly colored and picturesque episodes, is in every sense of the word an American play. Its author, R. W. Tully, is American, and while the scenes of his play are altogether laid in Hawaii, the native elements of the intrigue rather furnish a background than inspire the moving scenes of the drama. And this happens in spite of the nativity of the copper-colored heroine who is married by the rites of her own people to the American.

Mr. Tully has not been satisfied merely with writing a tale of life in Hawaii, but he has elected to draw from the material at his hand the conclusions that life may bring to Americans who take up their abode in Hawaii and allow themselves to enjoy to the full its sensual allurements. He makes his hero degenerate rapidly under these influences, but in order to show that such a course is not inevitable he contrasts with this disheartening wreck of the earlier scenes who is entirely saved through the love of a woman.

Not only has this American play the background of picturesque and highly tropical scenes, but there are music and dancing, the quaint observance of their pagan religion and similar episodes of life in Hawaii to make it plain that American playwrights have really now no complaint against the limitations imposed on them.

Probably Marion Fairfax never missed the lack of any such picturesque incidents or surroundings for her play of "The Talker" because she was endeavoring to represent life in a small suburb of New York. The scene of this play is even described by one of the characters as a suburb of a suburb, and there is internal evidence that it is Flushing near which the action of the drama passes.

Miss Fairfax was in the dramatic race for realism and truth to certain types of American life to which picturesqueness would have been fatal. It was the central character of the piece which supplied the title to the work. This woman has all the picturesqueness she requires in life, for she lives in a world of her own. She is a study of the new woman who is so emancipated from all but her opinions that she never thinks to apply them to the life about her. So intent is she on airing her ideas about the advanced view of the relations between the sexes that she does not even detect the fact that her younger sister is falling a victim to the attentions of a man who means no good to her.

Such a woman has no longing for the picturesque scenes of tropical life to make her happy. The little kingdom in which she lives is of her own creation and composed of her ideas and views on all topics, the fullest expression of her egotism in fact.

Possibly it is more difficult for a dramatist with such simple means to get as much effect as Mr. Tully does with all his force of incidental allurements. It is much more advantageous to the manager, for his expenses are less. He pays a few actors every week, buys one set of scenery and that is the extent of his outlay. One play of this kind made a fortune for all concerned in its production. That was "Paid in Full." Ever since that successful experiment of Eugene Walter's, there has been a constant search for the same sort of a middle class drama to repeat this success. It has not yet arrived although managers are always willing to take the slight risk that such an experiment demands.

A play so destitute of all spectacular and incidental features must indeed possess engrossing dramatic interest to hold its own in these days. The public is rarely interested in drabness even if it be associated with naturalness in the acting and truth to life in the making. One example of the public indifference to such qualities in a play even though there are logic and naturalness in the drama was shown here a few weeks ago. There was a drama of slum life in which the principal actress played extremely well the role of a poor mother who stole rather than have her child come into life among the dreary and unsanitary conditions in which she and her husband were compelled to live.

Professional observers of this drama were very much interested in the naturalness and humanity of the story and in the good acting of the principal characters. Some of them objected to the occasional appearance of the wealthy figures in the play who were introduced as settlement workers into the action. They thought them too much of a contrast to the others and did not realize that their brief exhibition of good clothes was just the note of vanity that the general public desires when it goes to the theatre. All must not be drab and in one tone of poverty or woe to interest. So the fine feathers occasionally do help to turn the plays into fine birds.

There is an entirely different sort of a heroine for his play was selected by Charles Nirdlinger when he came to write "Dolly Madison." His atmosphere is just as strongly native as that of Miss Fairfax's "Suburbia," although its picturesqueness is much more tangible than that kingdom of the conceited heroine. He has gone back to a very romantic period of American history and so filled his play with historical characters that one has the irresistible feeling of viewing from an orchestra seat a sudden vivification of the figures from the Eden Musee. Mr. Nirdlinger has selected his historical milieu because it was picturesque. It is a pretty play which is not embarrassed by any slavish deference to historical truth. It reveals Elsie Ferguson in an altogether charming light and her fresh figure gathers from her old-fashioned costumes a suggestion of quaintness that it never had possessed before. Then the dress of the historical figures about her has its genuine charm.

It would take no less a wizard of the stage than David Belasco to make the lobby of a Washington hotel an interesting spot to lovers of the romantic in the theatre. In the first place politicians are not creatures of sentiment and it is difficult to make them especially enticing figures. There is certainly no more inspiration in a hotel office with the va-et-vient of the place than the ordinary politicians might suggest. But with absolutely photographic realism Mr. Belasco succeeds in interesting the audience not only in the intrigue of Mr. de Mille's play, but in his photographic transfer of that hotel office to the stage. All the life throbbing under its roof was revealed in the symbols of everyday life. There is the passage of guests across the stage. One sees a dining room in the distance and knots of men sit about smoking and talking with a look of pseudo-intentness so characteristic of such figures in life under the same circumstances. Not every American playwright could make such an unpromising scene really a triumphant aid to the success of the play. Perhaps Mr. Belasco does it better than anyone else. The first act of "The Woman" is only a further evidence of the variety of themes on which the American playwright may work to-day.

STORY OF DANNY AND THE CISTERN

A Chapter From Don Marquis's New Book Which May Be Autobiographical.

EXCITEMENT OVER HANK

Episode in the Life of a Small Boy Who Lived in the Country in Illinois.

"I been around the country a good 'eal too, and seen and hearn of some awful remarkable things, and I never seen no one that wasn't more or less looney when the search us the femm comes into the case. Which is a dago word I got out'n a newspaper, and it means: 'Who was the dead gent's lady friend?'"

Thus speaks Danny of "Danny's Own Story," Don Marquis's new story. As Mark Twain served as his own original of many of his youthful and prankish characters, so it is reported that Danny's story is in large part its author's own. At any rate Mr. Marquis admits to having "been around the country a good 'eal" in varying guises, such as book agent, drug clerk, country printer, shoe salesman, farm hand, post office clerk, magazine editor, barnstorming actor, professional humorist, etc.

Also he admits that the story is laid in that part of Illinois with which he is most familiar through long residence. But he won't admit that he did everything that Danny confesses to. For instance, there is that episode of the cistern and Hank—at whose home the waif Danny lived.

"They was one thing in that house," narrates Danny, "I always admired when I was a kid. And that was a big cistern.

"Most people has their cisterns outside their house, and they is a tin pipe takes all the rainwater off the roof and scoots it into them. Ourn worked the same, but our cistern was right in under our kitchen floor, and they was a trap door with leather hinges opened into it right by the kitchen stove. But that wasn't why I was so proud of it. It was because that cistern was jest plumb full of fish: bullheads and red horse and sunfish and other kinds.

"Hank's father had built that cistern. And one time he brung home some live fish in a bucket and dumped 'em in there. And they growed. And they multiplied in there and refurnished the earth. So that cistern had got to be a fambly custom, which was kept up in that fambly for a habit. It was a great comfort to Hank, fur all them Walterses was great fish eaters, though it never went to brains. We fed 'em now and then, and throwed back in the little ones till they was growed, and kep' the dead ones picked out soon's we smelled anything wrong, and it never hurt the water none; and when I was a kid I wouldn't of took anything fur living in a house like that.

"Once, when I was a kid about 6 years old, Hank come home from the barroom. He got to chasing Elmira's cat 'cause he says it was making faces at him. The cistern door was open and Hank fell in. Elmira was over to town and I was scared. She had always told me not to fool around there none when I was a little kid, fur if I fell in there I'd be a corpse quicker'n scat!

"So when Hank fell in and I hearn him splash, being only a little feller and awful scared because Elmira had always made it so strong, I hadn't no sort of unbelief but what Hank was a corpse already. So I slams the trap door shut over that there cistern without looking in, fur I hearn Hank flopping around down in there. I hadn't never hearn a corpse flop before and didn't know but what it might be somehow injurious to me and I wasn't going to take no chances.

"So I went out and played in the front yard and waited fur Elmira. But I couldn't seem to get my mind settled on playing I was a horse nor nothing. I kep' thinking mebby Hank's corpse is going to come flopping out of that cistern and whale me some unusual way. I hadn't never been licked by a corpse and didn't rightly know jest what one is anyhow, being young and comparative innocent. So I sneaks back in and sets all the flatirons in the house on top of the cistern lid. I hearn something flopping and splashing and spluttering, like Hank's corpse is trying to jump up and is falling back into the water, and I hearn Hank's voice and got scareder yet. And when Elmira come along down the road she seen me by the gate a-crying and she asks me why.

"'Hank is a corpse,' says I, blubbering.

"'A corpse!' says Elmira, dropping her coffee which she was carrying home from the gineral store and post office. 'Danny, what do you mean?'

"I seen I was to blame somehow, and I wisht then I hadn't said nothing about Hank being a corpse. And I made up my mind I wouldn't say nothing more. So when she grabs holt of me and asts me ag'in what did I mean I blubbered harder, jest the way a kid will, and says nothing else. I wisht I hadn't set them flatirons on that door, fur it come to me all at oncet that even if Hank has turned into a corpse I ain't got any right to keep him in that cistern.

"Jest then Old Mis' Rogers, which is one of our neighbors, comes by, while Elmira is shaking me and yelling out what did I mean and how did it happen and had I saw it and where was Hank's corpse.

"And Mis' Rogers she says, 'Whats' Danny been doing now, Elmira?' me being always up to something.

"Elmira she turned around and seen her, and she gives a whoop and then hollers out: 'Hank is dead!' and throws her apron over her head and sets right down in the path and boohoos like a baby. And I bellers louder.

"Mis' Rogers, she never waited to ast nothing more. She seen she had a piece of news, and she's bound to be the first to spread it, like they is always a lot of women wants to be in them country towns. She run right across the road to where the Alexanderses lived. Mis' Alexander, she seen her coming and unhooked the screen door, and Mis' Rogers she hollers out before she reached the porch:

"'Hank Walters is dead!'

"And then she went footing it up the street. They was a black plume on her bunnet which nodded the same as on a hearse, and she was into and out of seven front yards in five minutes.

"Mis' Alexander, she runs acrost the the street to where we was, and she kneels down and puts her arm around Elmira, which was still rocking back and forth in the path, and she says:

"'How do you know he's dead, Elmira? I seen him not more'n an hour ago.'

"'Danny seen it all,' says Elmira.

"Mis' Alexander turned to me, and wants to know what happened and how it happened and where it happened. But I don't want to say nothing about that cistern. So I busts out bellering fresher'n ever, and I says:

"'He was drunk, and he come home drunk and he done it then, and that's how he done it,' I says.

"'And you seen him?' She says. I nodded.

"'Where is he?' says she and Elmira both to oncet.

"But I was too scared to say nothing about that there cistern, so I jest bawled some more.

"'Was it in the blacksmith shop?' says Mis' Alexander. I nodded my head agin and let it go at that.

"'Is he in there now?' asts Mis' Alexander. I nodded ag'in. I hadn't meant to give out no untrue stories. But a kid will always tell a lie, not meaning to tell one, if you sort of invite him with questions like that and get him scared the way you're acting. Besides, I says to myself, 'so long as Hank has turned into a corpse, and that makes him dead, what's the difference whether he's in the blacksmith shop or not?'

"Fur I hadn't had any plain idea, being such a little kid, that a corpse meant to be dead, and wasn't sure what being dead was like neither, except that they had funerals over you then. I knowed being a corpse must be some sort of a big disadvantage from the way Elmira always says keep away from that cistern door or I'll be one. But if they was going to be a funeral in our house I'd feel kind o' important too. They didn't have 'em every day in our town and we hadn't never had one of our own.

"So Mis' Alexander, she led Elmira into the house, both a-crying, and Mis' Alexander trying to comfort her, and me a-tagging along behind, holding onto Elmira's skirts and sniffling into them. And in a few minutes all the women Mis' Rogers has told come filing into that room, one at a time, looking sad. Only old Mis' Primrose, she was awful late getting there because she stopped to put on her bunnet she always wore to funerals with the black Paris lace on it her cousin Alminty White had sent her from Chicago.

"When they found out Hank had come home with licker in him and done it himself they was all excited, and they all crowds around and asts me how, except two as is holding onto Elmira's hands, which sets moaning in a chair. And they all asts me questions as to what I seen him do, which if they hadn't I wouldn't have told 'em the lies I did. But they egged me on to it.

"Says one woman: 'Danny, you seen him do it in the blacksmith shop?'

"I nodded.

"'But how did he get in?' sings out another woman. 'The door was locked on the outside with a padlock jest now when I came by. He couldn't of killed himself in there and locked the door on the outside.'

"I didn't see how he could of done that myself, so I begun to bawl ag'in and said nothing at all.

"'He must of crawled through that little side window,' says another one. 'It was open when I came by, if the door was locked. Did you see him crawl through the little side window, Danny?'

"I nodded. They wasn't nothing else fur me to do.

"'But you hain't tall enough to look through that ther window,' says another one to me. 'How could you see into that shop, Danny?'

"I didn't know, so I didn't say nothing at all; I jest sniffed.

"They is a store box right in under that window,' says another one. 'Danny must of climb onto that store box and looked in after he seen Hank come down the road and crawl through the window. Did you scramble onto the store box and look in, Danny?'

"I jest nodded agin.

"'And what was it you seen him do? How did he kill himself?' they all asts to oncet.

"I didn't know. So I jest bellers and boo-hoos some more. Things was getting past anything I could see the way out of.

"'He might of hung himself to one of the iron rings in the jist above the forge,' says another woman. 'He climb onto the forge to tie the rope to one of them rings, and he tied the other end around his neck and then he stepped off'n the forge. Was that how he done it, Danny?'

"I nodded. And then I bellered louder than ever. I knowed Hank was down in that cistern, a corpse and a mighty wet corpse, all this time; but they kind o' got me to thinking mebby he was hanging out in the shop by the forge, too. And I guessed I'd better stick to the shop story, not wanting to say nothing about that cistern no sooner'n I could help it.

"Pretty soon one of the women says, kind o' shivery: 'I don't want to have the job of opening the door of that blacksmith shop the first one!'

"And they all kind o' shivered then, and looked at Elmira. They says to let some of the men open it. And Mis' Alexander, she says she'll run home and tell her husband right off.

"And all this time Elmira is moaning in her chair. One woman says Elmira oughter have a cup o' tea, which she'll lay off her bunnet and go to the kitchen and make it fur her. But Elmira says no, she can't a-bear to think of tea, with poor Hennery a-hanging out there in the shop.

"But she was kind of enjoying all that fuss being made over her too. And all the other women says 'Poor thing.' But all the same they was mad she said she didn't want any tea, for they all wanted some and didn't feel free without she took it too. Which she said she would after they'd coaxed a while and made her see her duty.

"So they all goes out to the kitchen, bringing along some of the best room chairs, Elmira coming too, and me tagging along behind. And the first thing they noticed was them flatirons on top of the cistern door.

"Mis' Primrose, she says that looks funny. But another woman speaks up and says Danny must of been playing with them while Elmira was over town. She says:

"'Was you playing they was horses, Danny?'

"I was feeling considerable like a liar by this time, but I says I was playing horses with them, fur I couldn't see no use in hurrying things up. I was bound to get a lamming purty soon anyhow. When I was a kid I could always bet on that.

"So they picks up the flatirons, and as they picks 'em up they come a splashing noise in the cistern. I thinks to myself, Hank's corpse'll be out of there in a minute. One woman, she says:

"'Goodness gracious sakes alive! What's that, Elmira?'

"Elmira says that cistern is mighty full of fish, and they is some great big ones in there, and it must be some of them a-flopping around. Which if they hadn't of been all worked up and talking all to oncet and all thinking of Hank's body hanging out there in the blacksmith shop they might of suspicioned something. For that flopping kep' up steady, and a lot of splashing too. I mebby orter mentioned sooner it had been a dry summer and they was only three or four feet of water in our cistern, and Hank wasn't in scarcely up to his big hairy chest. So when Elmira says the cistern is full of fish, that woman opens the trap door and looks in."

This adventure of Danny's is but fairly begun, but is too long to be concluded here. However, this much serves to illustrate what kind of small boy Mr. Marquis was, if the report concerning the authenticity of Danny's story be well founded.

DANGER OF GASOLENE FUMES.

Your Auto Engine Can Put You Out of Business in a Short Time.

In a letter to the *New York Medical Journal* Dr. T. D. W. Pinckney declares that public warning should be given in regard to danger from fumes where gasolene is burned and cites the case of a man who was found unconscious and near death after being for a short time in a small room in which an automobile engine was running.

"Some time ago," he says, "I was also called to see a plumber who was rendered helpless and almost unconscious by fumes from his gasolene torch. It appears that only a small amount of the fumes is necessary to cause helplessness and that there is little or no warning of danger in the feeling of the one affected.

"Persons working alone in their small private garages are in grave danger when they let their engines run for even a short time," says Dr. Pinckney. "Chance alone saved the men in the two cases I mention."

California Wine Grapes.

Lodi correspondence Stockton Mail.

The total number of tons of wine grapes handled by the wineries in this vicinity during the last season reaches the surprising total of 70,000 tons. If this 70,000 tons of grapes had been converted into sweet wine the total number of gallons would approximate 5,600,000. It would be safe to say that at least 10 per cent. of this tonnage was converted into dry wines, which would bring the number of gallons up to a higher figure.

As between table and wine grapes the wine grape industry at the present time looks to be in the better shape. At $10 a ton for the common variety of grapes a rancher can show some profit. As table grapes have been selling for the last year or so there is little or no profit in them.

SNAKES IN PLASTER.

Poisonous and Non-Poisonous Kinds Pictured in Their Swamp.

In a small part of a South Carolina swamp represented on the second floor of the American Museum of Natural History is included a snake group among the logs, vines and water hyacinths. The group shows side by side poisonous snakes, the water moccasin, and the non-poisonous, the brown water snake.

An example of the deadly moccasin water snake of the South is made from a wax cast by James C. Bell, with color work by Frederick H. Stoll. It is extremely lifelike and realistic, quite enough to give the visitor an acquaintance with the species.

HOW LOUIS NAPOLEAN ESCAPED.

In the Disguise of a Workman He Passed the Guard at Fortress of Ham.

From le Journal des Debats.

In discussing the origin of Louis Napoleon's nickname of "Badinguet" some details were given incidentally of his escape from the fortress of Ham in northern France on May 25, 1846. Fuller details are now available, thanks to the researches of M. Thirria, and in view of the escape of Capt. Lux they have a special interest at the present moment.

It seems that the sole credit for the escape must lie with Louis Napoleon himself. He made his valet, Thelin, buy a black wig, some rouge, a cap which was scrubbed with pumice stone and a pair of sabots. Then he cut off his mustache, put on a blue apron, a blue pair of trousers and a close fitting shirt of coarse stuff.

Some workmen were carrying out some repairs to that part of the fortress where the Prince lodged and this gave color to his disguise, so much so that the two watchmen entertained no suspicions regarding the man who walked past them and out at the great gate, a pipe in his mouth and a plank on his shoulder. The sergeant on duty at the drawbridge was reading a letter as he passed and took no notice of him. It was then 5 o'clock in the morning.

Four times that day, the last time at 5 in the afternoon, did the Governor, Demarle, send for the Prince. Each time Dr. Conneau replied that the prisoner could not see anybody because he had taken medicine. When at last the Governor lost patience and went himself to the Prince's room and walked up to the bed on which the supposed invalid was lying he discovered that a very presentable dummy had taken the place of Louis Napoleon. The discovery was made too late. By that time the fugitive was over the Belgian frontier.