

SPRINGTIME IN THE THEATRES COMEDY WITH MUSIC PREVAILS

THE THEATRES THIS WEEK.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON.
KWICKERBOCKEN—Violet Romer in classic dances.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON.
DALY'S—Lewis Waller in "The Explorer," a play by W. Somerset Maugham.

The suggestion that the form of comic plays with music which are to be the only kind of entertainment offered to New Yorkers for some months to come was already in need of a decided change is the result of a knowledge of the difficulties encountered by managers in getting any return out of the investment in these productions. Many of them which are kept on view for some months are by no means the prosperous enterprises that they are supposed to be. It happened that the run of one of these pieces came to a sudden end not long ago, to the surprise of the credulous who had heard of its wonderful success. It appeared that the production had in fact met with only a moderate degree of popular favor during its extended run. Yet of the musical plays of the winter it had been accounted one of the most prosperous. Whether or not it will even be revived for use on the road, where its career was brief before its introduction to New York, has not been decided.

Another reminder that the time has come for some newer manner of combining music and comedy is to be found in the disproportion between all the effort involved in such plays and the result obtained. Canvas and satin, dancers and singers in hordes, comedians and variety performers are crowded into these productions in the effort to make the public surrender with less difficulty than they do to-day. It may be necessary to go on increasing the ammunition, although some natural wit and genuine melody would be much more potent in conquering the blasé audiences. What is most necessary, however, is the invention of a new form in which to combine these two elements for which the public has such a fondness.

Possibly the two geniuses who will accomplish this revolution are at hand. It needs two, for nobody may expect a Richard Wagner of operetta. Gilbert & Sullivan came to the rescue of a public surfeited with London adaptations of French opera bouffe and heavy British burlesque. London musical comedy of its best type—such as "The Geisha," "San Toy" and one or two of the earlier specimens—was, in spite of stretches of foggy tedium, nearly as attractive a novelty. The renaissance of the Viennese school of composers which showed itself with "The Merry Widows" was another departure from conventional forms that came into view at the psychological moment. That some such change is now necessary in amusements will not be denied by the observers of latest tendencies in the playhouses that devote themselves to musical plays.

In spite of the undoubted demand of the public to be entertained by comedy and light music there is not one of these plays which has attained the right to be classed among the successes of the season. Every one of these from "Buntz Pulla the Strings" to "The Return of Peter Grimm" has been straight drama, whether it were farcical or serious. So in spite of all the effort exhausted on these pieces even the most popular of them fails to get into the short list of plays that exists through a theatre year.

With the best of their kind there is of course always success. "The Merry Widows" set a standard which few of its successors will ever attain. There was never but one example of such a success as "The Geisha." To judge from the best of its kind there need never be any tedium in connection with any fashion of entertainment. It is, however, as its novelty fades that one sees how unsuited to a period a particular form may become. If it were always the best of its kind that the public was to get there might be less insistent demand for change which every recurring season of years brings. But there must be mediocre examples of every kind of musical play.

It seems as if the theatre was just at this instant overstocked with that particular quality of Viennese operetta. But that is in no way the result of the specimens of exhausted inventiveness which have recently been witnessed here. The season has brought forth many failures to meet the full measure of success expected of them. It is doubtful, however, if there has not been a larger percentage of these among the musical plays. So after all there does occasionally exist such complete weakness constitutional that not even renewed applications of funny men, dancers and singers can pull the victim through. Perhaps the efforts of the entrepreneurs

in the field of musical farce would be more successful were they not compelled to work on a style of entertainment of which the public is already weary.

What will the next form of musical fun be? George Ade and Gustav Luders seemed in "The Sultan of Sulu" to have struck a national note which possessed absolute novelty. They were evidently incapable of carrying it further, for nothing more of the same kind came from them. It may be that French farce adapted to musical accompaniment may satisfy the desire for a change to some simpler forms, while a fashion of writing musical farce so wholly novel as that invented by the genius of Gilbert may come into the theatre. Whatever it happens to be, there will be a public eager to welcome it.

In the meantime the managers might without difficulty edit their programmes sufficiently to spare the audience some part of the vulgarity to which they have been accustomed so long that it seems an inevitable part of all musical production. Why the Eds and Joes and Lous and Neds and AIs should be allowed to sprinkle themselves so familiarly over the average theatre programme it is not

easy to understand. These names may be all well enough in the bosom of their families or in their clubs or behind the scenes which hide their possessor from the view of the public. It must be, however, that these gifted gentlemen possess full names. They must have been called by some more formal titles than these abrupt abbreviations.

So it is quite unfair to compel the spec-

tor who possess no personal acquaintance with them, and moreover probably do not desire any, to refer to them as "Al" and the rest of the names which their friends bestow on them. It would be well worth the while of the press representative to dig out the full names of these artists and place them on view. It is not unjust to conclude that most of the spectators who visit the theatre are not so anxious to see Beerbolm Tre's personal performance as they are to witness the results of his labors with Shakespeare's play. So its visual beauties cannot be made too subordinate to satisfy such a public.

It must for the sake of the actor be important to acquire what may ultimately serve as a name. So long as an actor



HENRY BERGMAN AND FLORENCE REED IN "THE TYPHOON"



AL JOLSON.



WILFRID NORVAL



GRETE WIESENTHAL AT THE WINTER GARDEN.



HELEN PULLMAN IN "THE FATHER"



SYDNEY VALENTINE IN "THE PIGEON"



A.M. BOTSFORD IN "THE PIGEON"



VIOLET ROMER.

"THIRD FLOOR BACK" PASSES.

Forbes-Robertson to Cease Acting in the Play.

"The Passing of the Third Floor Back," which Forbes-Robertson has acted for the last time in this city at the Manhattan Opera House this week, is a fine example of the inconsistencies of the dramatist's fate. It would seem that a play written by Jerome K. Jerome would meet no difficulty in finding a manager willing to produce it. The mere name of the author should insure it a certain vogue despite its final success or failure. Such was not the case, however, of "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." Jerome's play was a decided departure from the ordinary modern drama and producers feared its effect on players who demand either the flippant, present day musical show, the deep seriousness of Ibsen or the satire of Shaw. The unadorned dialogue and prosaic situations of "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," with its homely phi-

losophy and seemingly too evident mission, did not appear to have any chance of pleasing the over fastidious patrons of the theatre.

Jerome was four years writing "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." The germ of it appeared in a short story written for an English magazine. The play followed two or three years later. When the play was first read by Forbes-Robertson the actor was very nervous as to its reception by the public. He recognized the human truths and the daring and original manner of presenting them in this play. He saw how effective it might be, but he was frankly afraid of its unconventionalities. The idea had struck him with great force, and his wife, Gertrude Elliott, who read the play with her husband, urged its production.

At that time Forbes-Robertson was preparing another drama for his London season, but he was looking for something to fill a gap of four or six weeks. Partly because as an artist he wanted the satisfaction of doing a true play and partly because he had a sincere hope and belief

that the people would feel the beauty of Jerome's modern morality he put it on in London.

The reception of "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" there was very unusual. The critics neither recommended it warmly nor denounced it. This is perhaps the most serious danger a critic can put on a new play. The people want to see the piece, however, and decided for its merits. The play ran for six months in London and was later presented in the provinces.

The following year Forbes-Robertson brought "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" to New York and for seven months it played at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. The second season covered all the large Eastern and middle western cities, including some of the Canadian cities. The third and last season was spent in visiting all the important cities of the United States and Canada. Engagements in over seventy cities in thirty different States were played.

If there were time and space it would be interesting to note the different ways in which "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" impressed the playgoers of the various sections of the country visited. The advance agent of the company tells

a curious story in regard to what the poet expected of the play. On arriving in a prosperous Albany, he found the treasurer of the theatre group the agent in the most welcome and hospitable terms. "Say," he said, "you're certainly going to go great in Albany all right." The agent smiled, but he was not at all surprised to hear that Jerome was coming to Albany. He was, for he was of the classing of "The King of the Third Floor Back" as a "king of the provinces."

"You know," the boy, a man con- sidered, "there isn't a better interest here and people think a heap of New York for the way he handled the play. Jerome says are going to see his play, 'reckon.' They're traveling over 30,000 miles, 'reckon,' appearing in seventy different months, thirty States, is quite a feat. In addition to this fact that as an artistic triumph of his far, on the has brought Forbes-Robertson season fortune. Such success is an excellent dramatic to write a play and being existing in spite of continued refusal of the managers. Then its more the performances and its four seasons credit surely stand for something.

"PATIENCE" IN NEW YORK.

Some of the Noted Singers in the Operetta.

"Patience" which is soon to be sung again at the Casino, has been heard less frequently in revival than some of the other operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, although it was in its heyday as popular as any of them. Its special satire has of course ceased to have any interest for the public, and managers were shy about putting it before the public again. But it will be once more heard on next Monday, and there will be an opportunity to observe whether or not the special satire on which Gilbert constructed his libretto has lost its interest for this generation. Of Sullivan's music there is of course no such question.

"Patience" had its initial production on any stage at the Opera Comique, London, on April 23, 1881, under the management of D'Oyly Carte. The first American presentation was given under the direction of James C. Duff at the Standard Theatre, New York, on September 23, 1881, with a company which included

William White as Eustace, James Barton Kay as Grosvenor, William L. Calton as Cawcutty, A. Wilkinson as Murgatroyd, L. Cartwright as Judge, Alice Burville as Lady Angela, Rose Chappelle as Lady Saphir, Jennie Stone as Lady Eliza, Augusta Koch as Lady Jane and Carrie Burton as Patience.

The production of "Patience" at the Standard Theatre was very successful. It is said to have made a profit of \$100,000 at that theatre, which was a large sum to be earned by any one attraction in those days. After the original production it received successive presentations at the Standard on September 23, 1882, and on April 18, 1883. Most of the original players remained for the presentation in 1882, but the cast was radically changed for that of a year later. On that occasion Marie Jensen was Patience and Helen Lowell was Lady Saphir.

Naturally in those days of lax copyright protection a piece like this was not able to enjoy a success without the composition of other companies. Some of these rival productions were as follows: "Haverly's Theatre," February 20 to February 15, 1882, with a cast including W. H. Seymour, C. M. Pyke, Lithgow James, Emma Howson, Richard Golden, Alonso Hatch, Pauline Hall, Gertrude Orme, Louise Manfred, Stetson's Fifth Avenue Theatre, February 24, 1883, for four weeks; "The American Theatre," March 1, 1883, with a cast including Marie Stone, George Frothingham and H. C. Barnabas; Booth's Theatre, November 14, 1882, with a cast including Verona Jarboe, Irene Perry, Rose Cook, Rose Temple, Henry Laurent, Gustavus F. Hall and Eugene Clark; and Palmer's Theatre, September 10, 1882, with a cast headed by Henry E. Day.

The two revivals of "Patience" most commonly called to mind occurred at the Herald Square Theatre on July 16, 1886, and at the American Theatre on March, 1900, by the Castle Square Opera Company. The cast for the Herald Square Theatre revival was Henry E. Day, Rose Cook, Rose Temple, Irene Perry, Rose Cook, Joseph Schell, Lillian Russell, Sadie Martinot, Dorothy Weston, Lillian Swain and Flora Edwards. The company which presented the famous 1900 production at the American Theatre included Frank Moulton, Henry Thomas, Louise Casavant, Reginald Roberts, Florence Morgan, Gertrude Quinlan, Belle Seymour, Florence De Luce and Carl Godfrey.

from actors and managers during the preceding century. It was no uncommon incident of a provincial playhouse in England so late as the first third of the nineteenth century to produce names, names founded on the plays of Shakespeare. These were of course crude imitations, drawn from the tragedy, in which only the principal incidents were retained. Such a play, without the dignity of a moving picture reproduction of its scenes from them. Yet there had been in previous years even less considerate mutilations of the dramas all undertaken with the purpose of improving them. The genius of Shakespeare was so little thought of by the nonentities of the eighteenth century that the least famous of them never hesitated to make what he considered a play in conformity with the taste of his day out of the best of them.

Tate's version of "Lear," with its lack of so much that is essential in the tragedy, hold its place on the stage from 1681 to 1840 in spite of the delusions which surrounded it of its original beauty. Such a treatment could have endured so long, however, only in the case of a drama with a little popular appeal as "Lear." Shadwell did not hesitate to make a drama according to his own ideas and what he conceived as the taste of his day out of "Timon of Athens," while Otway contrived a "Romeo and Juliet" of his own from the play which the English speaking nation regards as its greatest drama of love. Even Dryden consented to collaborate with Lessart in making out of the original of "The Tempest" a play that possessed none of the beauty of Shakespeare's work, but remained a monument to the lack of judgment and appreciation that prevailed in the centuries following the death of the dramatist. How much greater present day respect for his genius is the history of their so-called improvements shows.

"The Merry Wives of Windsor," with its separate threads of action, was always a favorite object of attack on the part of the gentlemen who felt capable of improving Shakespeare and willing to undertake the task. John Dennis, who made "The Comical Gallant" out of the comedy, wrote plausibly as to his reasons for this courage in laying hands on the work. He mentioned as one justification that during the reign of Charles II. the play had never been received with any cordiality. He was evidently a believer in the well made drama, for he calls the beauties of the text sufficient to counteract during the lifetime of the author the imperfections of the construction although they must inevitably continue to grow more intolerable to future generations.

"There are no less than three actions in it that are independent of one another," he wrote, "which divide and distract the minds of the audience. There is more than one significant scene which has nothing to do with any other part of the play, which is enough to obstruct and stifle the action. The style is in some places stiff and forced and affected."

John Dennis seems to have had some ideas as to critical consideration of the drama but he was not so strong at play-making. So "The Comical Gallant" did not prove in the least a successor to "The Merry Wives of Windsor." Perhaps one reason for this was the complete deletion of some of the characters and such a change in others that they bore no relation to the pictures that Shakespeare drew. It has been said that Ford all but disappeared, while most of the humor was taken out of the fat knight's character. It was a strange idea of one of the improvers of Shakespeare that all the humor should be taken out of "Henry V." and for that reason he cut out all the comedy scenes and characters who had any comic interest. Aaron Hill, who was responsible for this alteration of the chronicle, did not have the reward of success for this effort, although he was known as a dramatist in his day. Public interest in this experiment was sufficient to keep it alive for only six performances. In view of all these experiments with the text of Shakespeare, it is not far to say that this age has been lacking in respect to the works of the dramatist who is to this day revered as he never was in the centuries nearer to his own time.

New York's indifference to the plays of Shakespeare has always been a source of complaint from the actors who have appeared here. Mrs. Modjeska a year ago was fond of telling of the enthusiasm with which the audiences of other cities greeted her revivals of some of the less familiar dramas of the Shakespearean theatre. To-day E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe are sure of large and intelligent audiences whenever they play in this city. They have adopted the permanent policy of giving their engagements at so-called popular prices. They charge usually half a dollar less than the other theatres which offer Maurice, Gaby Deslys or George Cohan, since rivalry with any such established favorites of the New York public as these would be out of the question. But in spite of this reduction in prices, the following of these two representative actors is of a high intellectual order.

In other cities they do not find it necessary to play to popular priced audiences, and their engagements, like those of Robert Shakespeare, are not far from most prosperous that any of the larger cities ever know. No such enthusiasm for the plays of Shakespeare exist here. Mr. Mantell's audiences in this city are rarely large. His productions are no more than adequate. With more elaborate visual features they might be much more attractive to the general public. The equipment serves well enough for the cities which appreciate Shakespeare, however, and for that reason it is not perhaps worth while to attempt to bring them up to the standard which might make New York audiences T. Carleton, W. McCandless, Aubrey Boucicault, Joseph Schell, Lillian Russell, Sadie Martinot, Dorothy Weston, Lillian Swain and Flora Edwards. The company which presented the famous 1900 production at the American Theatre included Frank Moulton, Henry Thomas, Louise Casavant, Reginald Roberts, Florence Morgan, Gertrude Quinlan, Belle Seymour, C. M. Pyke, Lithgow James, Emma Howson, Richard Golden, Alonso