THE WEEK'S PLAYS

Grace George in "MAJOR BARBARA"

Olga Brittan and Lillian Horn in "ALONE AT LAST"

Ethel Barrymore in "OUR MRS. McCHESNEY"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

STRANGE plays are coming now from England. They are even stranger than some of our own apparently prosperous products which would never have created a ripple when the public in the playhouse demanded good drama or none at all. But nothing in the line of native plays has been quite so far from all possible toleration as "The Angel in the House," while the riot created by the American managers' struggle for "The Ware Case" seems beyond all comprehension. Even if it be true that London is enthusiastic over George Pleydell's play any American manager could have told from reading the piece that it had no chance of success. It violates the most fundamental rule of the playwright's craft. Far be it from us to mention that rule. It is sufficient of a taint to indicate that the work of the playwright is an art without descending into such details as the particular errors which are to be found in plays.

But the same error was not to be seen in "Under Cover," although Mr. Megrue was accused of deriving his chief interest from the concealment of the hero's actual identity until the end of the play. But there were many things that were not concealed, and there were enough of them to make the piece interesting. There never was a skilful playwright who told all that he knew about his characters. Something was always so concealed that the audience knew more than the players—there, the secret's popped out—and it was the degree of skill with which information was gradually allowed to escape to the audience that decided the degree to which the play was interesting.

That the bare exposition of all that is important may have a fatal effect on the success of a play was shown in the case of "The Moonstone" when a dramatic version of Wilkie Collins's novel was given in London years ago. The first act contained the revelation of the theft and the audience could certainly not be said to know less than the actors in this case. As a matter of fact the spectators knew it all. So it was never possible to restore their interest.

Thus the play passed away because there was no mystery to clear up. Having such a complete knowledge of all that had happened it was impossible to sit quietly and watch the actors mystified over something that everybody on the other side of the footlights perfectly well understood. Yet with the mystery slowly imparted to the spectators the play might have been as absorbing as the book.

There were reasons for supposing that the rich blighter in "The Ware Case" had killed his brother-in-law, although the actor was absent from the stage for such an incredibly brief period that the broadest stretch of dramatic license did not make it seem possible for him in such a short space of time to have committed the murder to which he confessed. That was a trick to make the audience still more ignorant as to the perpetrator of the crime. Just in the degree that the audience was allowed to learn of the facts of "The Ware Case" was it absorbed in the development of the story.

"The Ware Case" is at best but a product of paste and scissors. Mr. Pleydell or Mr. Bancroft has pasted together the leaves of his book, but this process never made a play. It is singular to note the hollowness and insincerity of speeches when there is no dramatic vitality back of them. The most banal expression from a character when there lies back of the speech some dramatic significance is pregnant with eloquence when it is expressive of the theatric element of the play. If such a line be written with a literary sense, with wit or with finish it is certain to be very much better. But the rest of the qualities avail little when words are not vitalized by the element of drama.

There was precious little of this priceless element at any time during "The Ware Case." Lou-Tellegen's superb acting in the final scenes brought some belated interest. M. Tellegen strutted and pouted, teetered about the stage and preened himself during the first act and second act with no evidence of possessing the slightest control of any lighter moods of playing. Then the more he dresses in the style of the day the more exotic does he appear. Whether it be in "Maria Rosa," in which he was better than he has ever been since in the English theatre, or in "Secret Strings," he is ordinary in looks compared to the appearance he presents in the dress of the day.

M. Tellegen is plainly not for all markets. He will be useless to any American manager who does not put him into the cloak and dagger drama. But there could have been nothing finer than the tense, absorbed manner in which he sat motionless in the prisoners' dock and listened to the testimony for and against him or the splendid desperation with which he took the poison and declared his guilt. Finer, freer and more imaginative romantic acting has not been seen on the New York stage in years. Unluckily, M. Tellegen needs a play in which he can be acting constantly at this rate or he is likely to pall.

THE NEW PLAYS THIS WEEK.

MONDAY—Theatre Francais—"Mme. Josette, Ma Femme," farce by Pierre Gavault.
TUESDAY (afternoon)—Lyceum Theatre—Matinee of songs by Yvette Guilbert.
THURSDAY—The Playhouse—Grace George is to produce "Major Barbara," by Bernard Shaw.

PLAYS CHARLES FROHMAN THOUGHT THE PUBLIC LIKED

The late Charles Frohman was not always successful in his choice of plays, but he had very decided ideas as to what the public liked. John D. Williams tells about these principles in his interesting memories of the manager in the *Century* of the present month.

When he talked plays Frohman always relied upon certain pet formulas. He knew nothing and cared less about the technic of the drama; he hated the term; but he ordered or accepted plays for himself or accounted for the success of plays produced by other men by squaring them with two or three formulas as quaint as himself.

"You can't find any better scheme for play building than the old nursery tales. 'Monsieur Beaucaire,' 'Cyrano de Bergerac' and all such plays in which youth is triumphant are variations and of course amplifications of the tale of 'Prince Charming.' 'Peg o' My Heart,' 'Daddy Long Legs' and similar enormous successes the popularity of which cannot be accounted for in themselves always win great publics because the public, like so many tired children at the end of a long day, loves nothing so much as to hear the story of 'Cinderella.' 'Within the Law,' 'The Lion and the Mouse' and that kind of play almost never fail because they contain the formula of the woman triumphant. Americans love to see woman triumph over men.

"All great plays are written backward, not forward, because every great play is the solution of some human blunder. Every real dramatist when starting to write a play begins with the climax of his penultimate act, working backward and forward from that. Audiences instantly revolt from 'unhappy endings' not because they are unhappy, but because they are usually contradictions of the hopes implanted in them by the playwright and cherished until dashed by the unhappy ending. Detective plays almost always succeed because they make actors of auditors. For popular success it is important in the theatre to work your audiences into that state of mind where every man and woman feels certain that they could save the situation, prevent a tragedy, avert a catastrophe or effect the escape of a likable thief if only they could step over the footlights or cry out. Then your audience is acting with your play.

"The best situation in a theatre sense ever put on the stage is the screen scene in 'The School for Scandal.' That is because there are three characters on the stage—two are in the foreground and one is in the background, behind a screen—and the suspense of the situation, what makes it fine drama, is that the audience knows all that the characters on the stage know and a little more besides; the auditors are just enough ahead of the plot to be wishful that it shall work out their way. In such a case an unhappy ending would be a violation of the wishes already implanted in the hearts and minds of the audience. When I ask an author for an upward ending to an act or a play I mean an ending that will justify the expectations built up by the people who see that play on the premises already laid down."

But Frohman was most graphic when he talked of men, especially when he told humorous stories, for then he was really a remarkable actor, and by pantomime, facial expression, the crouching or the rearing of his shoulders and head and the dexterous use of his hands he could put a whole scene before you. "I like authors," he once said; "they are so like actors, only usually without an actor's sense of humor. But they always expect anything or everything of their work, just like actors; and if the roof over the stage should fall down during the performance of a play dramatized from an author's book I would not put it past any author to think of the catastrophe as a stage effect worthy of his book. In 1898 Bret Harte and I were sitting in the auditorium of the Garrick Theatre, London. I was producing a play called 'Sue' made out of one of his novels. Annie Russell was *Sue*. The piece was not to be shown to the public until several nights later, but we all thought it would be a fine compliment to Mr. Harte to give him a special performance; so everything was got ready as carefully as for a first night, with only Harte and me as an audience. We took seats in the stalls, Harte well in front of me as pleased as a child about to be shown a new toy and the company as excited as if the king were present. The author looked his part. He had a fine head of wonderful white hair, and I remember he wore then, and always after when I saw him, a rather large, curiously knotted scarlet cravat, a kind of scarlet that I had never seen but once before and then in a Cardinal's robe. Of course there was awful tension on the stage among the actors, so much so that at the end of the second act Miss Russell became so wrought up that she flung her hands above her head and just as the curtain fell collapsed from exhaustion. I was terrified, and as quick as I could I jumped up from my seat and ran for the stage, fearing the worst; but as I passed Bret Harte I heard him murmuring, 'Great climax! Real acting! Wonderful scene!' He really believed it a part of the play."

"Fine" was Frohman's favorite adjective when he spoke in admiration of people or plays. He had barely a working vocabulary and was always amused at the parade of words by others. Yet he had a gift that was like magic in cogently packing whole sentences into words. Compactness was the chief characteristic of his talk. In an hour Frohman could say as much as some would say in three. Usually when he talked he sat on the edge of his chair, often with one leg under him, like a tailor. Even when he leaned forward in the eager earnestness of talk his shoulders were still square, and in the position were his three salient traits, alertness, precision and tensity of will. The alertness shone clearest in his eyes. They were neither piercing nor searching, but steadily clear and bright. A fresh idea, a recollection recalled, an agreeable anticipation, a disappointment, of which the humor but never the bitterness remained—all in turn animated him. Frohman had eyes that were always seeing something—plays, authors, conditions, plans and hopes, and seeing them as living things. Some eyes see to the heart of things and others see all things as vague visions. Frohman saw everything alive. Tenaciously he would mentally grapple with words to make his meaning unmistakably plain. Almost all his sentences were short. In every one the idea and the expression were closely knit. Sometimes he would pause, seemingly for an interminable period, filled only with "Ah's," and then to his lips would spring an expression of matchless conciseness, as well coined as a perfect piece of stage dialogue. The tensity of his attitude when he talked—his right hand resting lightly on his breast, his eyes distended as if to hypnotize—held one in a spell. His habitual manner was of keen and controlled vitality. Nobody was ever more eagerly alive than Frohman; and yet he directed all his life into a single channel, and held it there. He never said he loved his work; he did not need to say so. His love of the theatre and its people spoke spontaneously in his every sentence and glance. He never thought of it as a field for gain—experience over and over cruelly taught him the opposite—but he loved it as the greatest of all international games. England and America were his chessboard; stars, plays and playwrights his pawns.

Frohman knew his playwrights as he did his stars, their tastes, their habits, what they liked to talk about, what they liked to do, their big sides and their little; but above all he knew better than they themselves how to get plays out of them, how to stimulate them to work, and when to bring pressure to bear on a play that threatened never to be finished. And the blend of fear and fondness that they had for him usually made them anxious to please him. One summer in Paris Frohman had five playwrights, three English and two French, congratulating themselves on being his guests at his hotel, but soon all found themselves hard at work in separate rooms, laying out fresh scenarios, revamping or translating. Personal association with Frohman was always conditioned by one's direct or indirect connection with the theatre. If you were an author and went for a stroll with him the time would be put to immediate use in a talk of possible plays in your books. Once Frohman's door opened and in strode Henri Bernstein, as excited as a man almost out of his mind with the news that "the master," meaning Sardou, was dead. Frohman calmed the frenzied Frenchman by laying his hand upon Bernstein's shoulder and saying:

"Long live the master! Now let me tell you a little story. Under just these circumstances years ago Sardou himself one day entered my rooms here in Paris, throwing himself into a chair with the statement, 'It's a pity, but Dumas fils is dead.' I was amazed.

"'You don't mean it!' I exclaimed; 'I didn't even know he was ill.'

"'Oh,' replied Sardou, 'he breathes, he walks about and seems alive, but he is really dead. The newspapers are praising him.' At least let us be thankful that is not the death that has come to Sardou."

Frohman's way of freshening himself in England was by week end excursions to Marlow, which he loved very dearly; in America by retreating very rarely to a farm at White Plains, but oftener, and relished as much, by riding about the park in a victoria, his theory being that "taxicabs go so fast they rush past all the best air in the park." He never felt himself rich enough to own an automobile, and it used to amuse him enormously that "of all the people in my building only the elevator man and I feel that way." His quick trips for opening night out of New York used to recreate him a great deal, though everything depended on what the hotel was like in the city he was visiting. After many sad experiences he selected these cities for the excellence of their hotels, not their audiences. He laid great stress on the importance of periodically renewing oneself by new environments. "What we'll do after this," he enthusiastically announced to me one morning, "is to dine each time in a different hotel. Then it will seem just like visiting so many little towns; only we won't have to put up with the bad hotels in the little towns."

A Play a Week Here.

The Standard Theatre will this week restore May Irwin to her middle upper West Side admirers at a temperature more adapted to enjoyment than that in which she last played here. She is still acting in "33 Washington Square." There are to be some new songs for this engagement.

Another plump public favorite will be seen anew this week in New York. This is Julian Eltinge. He will be at the Lexington Theatre. "Cousin Lucy" is the play, and among the actors are Jane Oaker, Dallas Welford and Mrs. Stuart Robson.

The Irving Place Theatre still presents Leo Ascher's charming operetta "Her Highness Loves Waltzing," which has attracted the general public as well as the regular clientele of that theatre. The operetta is delightfully performed.

PICTURES THIS WEEK.

The Knickerbocker Theatre's programme this week offers a number of the Triangle's stars. William Collier, Weber and Fields, Sam Bernard, Jane Gray, Tully Marshall and George Fawcett are to be seen in the three parts of the bill. George Fawcett and Willard Mack, two dramatic rough diamonds, will be seen in a capital—and labor—play. The comedians appear in a typical rough neck farce and Miss Gray will act with Tully Marshall in a Griffith play.

Robert Mantell and Genevieve Harper will be seen in "The Unfaithful Wife" at the Academy of Music and at the Riverside Theatre this week. Miss Hamper plays the young wife who is unfaithful and Mr. Mantell is the very old husband who has to stand for it.

The Strand Theatre has a picture play made out of "Jane," which Charles Frohman used as a means of starring Johnstone Bennett. She was very short, while Charlotte Greenwood, who plays the part in the picture version, is—well, taller. Herbert Standing and Lydia Yeamans Titus are also in the cast. Miguel Rossier, tenor; Zarad Fisher and Harriet Scholder will provide the music.

The war pictures will be continued at the Fulton and the Cohan Theatres and at the Park Theatre "Germany on the Firing Line" will be shown on the screen for the first time. This picture embodies a chronological history of the war up to and including the entry into Warsaw by the Kaiser at the head of his troops.

Frank Daniels is coming to the Vitagraph Theatre this afternoon for a sojourn in Mary Rhinehardt's "What Happened to Father." "A Question of Right and Wrong" and "The Home Cure" will also be given.

Julia Arthur in "THE ETERNAL MAGDALENE"

ONE NEW PLAY THIS WEEK.

Also a Revival in French and the Unique Yvette.

The Theatre Francais will present in French on Monday night at the former Berkeley Lyceum Pierre Gavault's three act farce which has already been seen here in English as "My Wife," with John Drew and Billie Burke, and in German at the Irving Place Theatre. The leading role will be played by the charming Lillian Greuze. Raymond Faure will have the opposite role.

"Le Souris," by Edouard Pailleron, will be acted at the Friday matinee.

Yvette Guilbert is to give her six concerts at the Lyceum Theatre. The first will be on Tuesday afternoon and the interesting French artist will sing songs of old France. Other appearances will be on Friday afternoon next, on Tuesday of next week and on the next Friday.

The two evening concerts will be on next Sunday and the following Sunday.

Grace George will make her third production on Thursday next, when she will be seen in "Major Barbara," by Bernard Shaw. It has never been acted in this country.

Louis Calvert, who staged the play in London for Vedrenne & Barker and acted the principal male role, *Undershaft*, manufacturer of ammunition, has staged the play for Miss George and will act that same part. Charlotte Granville, Clarence Durwent, Margaret Calvert and Arthur Aldred have also been specially engaged for "Major Barbara." Miss George will have the support of the same company that has been with her since early fall, including Ernest Lawford, Conway Tearle, Mary Nash, Josephine Lovett and others. Miss George will play the title role.

"Major Barbara" deals with the Salvation Army and the manufacture of war munitions. *Barbara Undershaft*, daughter of *Undershaft*, a powder king, and granddaughter of an earl, has gone into the army, and proved herself so efficient that she is promoted to be a major. *Lady Britomart*, her mother, desiring to see *Barbara* and her sister established for life, sends for *Mr. Undershaft*, who has been separated from his family for years, and introduces him to them. *Undershaft* and *Barbara* take a great liking to each other. She challenges him to visit the Salvation Army and he replies with a challenge to visit his cannon works. A contest of personality ensues, with *Cusins*, a young man in love with Barbara, as an interested spectator. The first scene is in *Lady Britomart's* home, the second scene in the yard of the Salvation Army Shelter, there is a short scene back at *Lady Britomart's*, and then a scene in the model factory town where war munitions are made.

The Playhouse will be dark for the first three nights of this week because Miss George and her company go to New Haven to appear under the auspices of the Yale University Dramatic Association.

THE PLAYS THAT LAST.

The plays that continue in New York are "Our Mrs. McChesney" at the Lyceum Theatre, "Lord Dundreary" at the Booth Theatre, "Hobson's Choice" at the Comedy Theatre, "The Chief" at the Empire Theatre, "The Boomerang" at the Belasco Theatre, "Common Clay" at the Republic Theatre, "The Ware Case" at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, "Sadie Love" at the Gaiety Theatre, "The Eternal Magdalene" at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, "Romeo and Juliet" at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre, "Under Fire" at the Hudson Theatre, "Treasure Island" at the Punch and Judy Theatre, "The Great Lover" at the Longacre Theatre, "Rolling Stones" at the Harris Theatre, "Fair and Warmer" at the Eltinge Theatre, "Abe and Mawruss" at the Lyric Theatre, "Hit-the-Trail Holliday" at the Astor Theatre, "The Unchastened Woman" at the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre, "The Birth of a Nation" at the Liberty Theatre.

The musical plays are "Chin Chin" at the Globe Theatre, "Alone at Last" at the Shubert Theatre, "The Blue Paradise" at the Casino Theatre, "Around the Map" at the New Amsterdam Theatre and "A World of Pleasure" at the Winter Garden.

The Hippodrome is open with Sousa's Band, "Hip-Hip-Hooray" and "Flirting at St. Moritz," a big spectacular offering.

Vaudeville and Burlesque.

PALACE THEATRE—Irene Franklin returns again to vaudeville at the Palace Theatre this week and will be seen and heard in some new songs and sayings, assisted by her husband, Burton Green. She is always a popular favorite. Others on the programme will include Florence Roberts and company, Marie Norstrom, Norton and Lee, Eis and French, Frank North Company, Kathleen Clifford and Meehan's trained dogs.

COLONIAL THEATRE—Joan Sawyer, back from a tour of Western cities, will be the particular attraction here this week in dancing steps. Others include May Robson in "John Henry," Van and Schenck, Hussey and Boyle, Moon and Morris, the Cameron Sisters, Maria Lo, Carl McCullough, the Clown Seal and Sunday concerts to-day.

ALHAMBRA THEATRE—Mercedes, who according to the press agent is "the psychic eighth wonder of the world," has first place on the programme. The supporting entertainers will be Bessie Wynn, Hussey and Boyle, "The Passion Play of Washington Square," Morris and Beasley, John Cutty and the Five Belmonts.

COLUMBIA THEATRE — A new one act burlesque and an attractive vaudeville bill will be the entertainment at the Columbia theatre this week. The first part is called "At Saratoga Springs" and the second "A Night in India." A competent company of burlesquers supply the abundant fun in the lines.

YORKVILLE THEATRE—The Mischief Makers will be here this week. It is one of the standard attractions of the Columbia circuit, and the company includes Felix Rush, George Brennan, Ben Rumley, Margaret Shannon, Ruby Lusby and Mabel Clark. The feature of the vaudeville part is the "Aloha Twins."

WHERE TO DANCE.

There is a dancing floor at Chez Fysher's as well as a piano and Irene Bordoni. M. Fysher sings little French songs in a little French way, as if he meant to be confidential and didn't want the matter to go any further. Then Bonnie Glass dances with M. Rudolphe in the afternoon and various other persons in the evening. Suzanne Feindel arises behind the piano and sings in the dress of a midinette. Smoke and champagne are on hand in about equal amounts and the joy is unconfined.

There are still to be found on the Strand Roof Garden competitors for the Anne Morgan one step prize, the Vanderbilt fox trot prize, the Elisabeth Marbury tango prize, the Elsie de Wolfe lame duck prize and other important incentives to correct one stepping. There is dancing now on Sundays.

Whenever the curtain rises at Castles in the Air on the sight of the beautiful skating there is such a rush of cool air through the place that one realizes the superiority of art over nature. Then the cooking is so good that there is, after all, a certain gratitude to art for some of its benefactions.

Ned Wayburn having retired from the classic atmosphere of the Century Theatre, has gone down to the Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic to stage manage that popular performance. His stage management is confined to the performers, so the dancers may continue to enjoy themselves with no fear of being disciplined by Mr. Wayburn. But Will Rogers, Odette Myrtil, Sybil Carmen and the rest of the help must look out for him.