

SHAW AND THE ENGLISH THEATRE



LUCIENNE BOGAERT and VALENTINE TESSIER of the THEATRE du VIEUX COLOMBIER.

Special Correspondence to The Sun. London, March 3. I ASKED George Bernard Shaw the other day, "Why is it that of twenty-nine London theatres only four are presenting plays of any dramatic value?" "Because I haven't time to write for the lot of them," was his characteristically modest retort. "If I had—perhaps you'd better ask them if they'd like me to first. I'm too busy!" Another day I met G. B. S. on the escalator of the underground railway. "These confounded things!" he growled over his beard. "I've had time to write a page and a half of a play since we came up."

Now, if Shaw makes two trips a day on the electric—a true Socialist never

is proffered the able dramatist of today. For 1917 was by way of being the most successful financial year on record. The food queues in London today line up along the sidewalk, to the length of a block or more. The queues of people waiting for the afternoon and evening performances of the theatres are usually double, sometimes triple and quadruple that length. Britain may have to forego her beef and her butter, but she positively, definitely refuses to abandon her amusements. Theatrical managers are busier than they have ever been before. De Courville has something like ten plays in course of production. Manager Butt anticipates putting on in the near future "Very Good Eddie," "Fair and Warner," "The Bird of Paradise" and five other plays, musical, farcical and fantastic.

Only last week a certain manager with a new play endeavored to find a theatre to stage it. To his astonishment not a theatre in London was vacant, nor would be for three months. That talented actress, Marie Lohr, pays \$7,500 a week for the privilege of entering into management. And Tree's handsome theatre—His Majesty's—recently changed hands to the tune of \$600,000, the purchaser being Benson, a nitrate merchant of Liverpool, who last autumn gave \$400,000 for the Shaftesbury Theatre. In both instances the leases are held by the firm of Grosvenor & Laurillard.

When the run of "Chu Chin Chow" is concluded, however, there will still be an interesting link between the old

of number of performances the list reads as follows: "Romance," January 1 to December 31, 1917. "Zig-Zag," revue, 600 performances. "Maid of the Mountains," musical comedy, ten months. "Seven Days Leave," melodrama, eight months. "General Post," comedy, seven months. "Bubbly," revue, eight months. "Inside the Lines," melodrama, eight months. "Carmenita," operetta, seven months. "The Boy," musical comedy, seven months. "Round the Man," revue, seven months. "The Better 'Ole," melodrama, seven months. "Ariette," musical comedy, five months. "The Yellow Ticket," melodrama five months. *American productions.

of those that have terminated the following were the most successful: "Damaged Goods," drama, 281 performances. "Suzette," musical fantasy, 256 performances. "Under Cover," drama, six months. "Rinky-Pinky," revue, 184 performances. "The Aristocrat," drama, 150. "Remnant," drama, 125. "Three Weeks," melodrama, 125. "The Mistake," comedy, 108. *American production.

The outstanding success of all plays of the season is "Romance." This perennially fresh silhouette of human emotions bids fair to outlast even the drama of war. The house is as crowded at every performance as it was in the first month of production. The play has totalled already 948 representations. And when later it celebrates its 1,000th birthday it will create a record.

Blanche Ring will head the programmes in the Orpheum Theatre this week, singing new as well as her old songs. Pat Rooney and Marion Bent will present a new satire called "Over Here." Jack Wilson will also appear and the Ford Sisters will dance their "Revue of 1918." Larry Reilly will sing ballads, Gardner Hartman will sing and be funny, and Adeline Francis will have her own voice as an accompaniment on the phonograph. Carter de Haven and Flora Parker will hold first place in the Bushwick Theatre, doing their musical comedy act. James and Bonnie Thornton will sing their old songs. Gus Edwards will present his "Band Box Revue." W. J. (Sailor) Reilly, U. S. N., will sing patriotic and love songs as well as her old songs. "Pat Reclamation." Others on the programme will include Moss and Frye, Harry G. Richards and Bessie Kyle and Jack and Cora Williams. The "Speedway Girls" will occupy the stage of the Star Theatre this week. They comprise a chorus of twenty girls. They are said to be "classy."



FRANCES WHITE in "LET'S GO"

travels otherwise—any school boy can figure it out, that is twenty-one pages a week; one play every three months; four a year. What happens to these plays?

And what has become of that triumvirate, Barrie, Pinero and Shaw? Their combined efforts last year gave the English stage two plays and a sketch. Who knows but what the grunt Fabian may even now be contemplating the perpetration of a spectacular revue upon the unsuspecting world. Pinero, may be, is deep in the travail of a crook play, and Barrie stuck for a couplet in a musical comedy. In the nonce able pens have stepped into the breach. May be lacking the glowing satire, the intensive retrospective of conventions, the artificial technique of "His House in Order," the bubbling phantasia of Peter, but the new stuff is good stuff. Artificiality has been sacrificed to humanity—to inspired realism. The new order of playwrights is essentially realistic. It does not wrap life in cotton wool and set it up on some impossible pinnacle, but rather adds humor and pathos and comedy to the every day. There is Harold Terry of "General Post" fame; a young man, with a very youthful appreciation of life, but with a keen sense of dramatic values. Somerset Maugham, who, apart from an occasional lapse of maudlin sentiment, has given us some of the most delightful comedies of the day. A wide scope

THE BROOKLYN PLAYS.

"Love o' Mike," the musical comedy with George Haskell and the original cast, will have a week's engagement in the Majestic Theatre, beginning tomorrow. The cast includes Clifton Webb, Max Leeds, Alan Edwards, Clara Stratton, Ruth Mabee and Alison McBain. "The Country Cousin," written by Booth Tarkington and Julian Street, with Alexandra Carlisle as the cousin, has been booked for a return engagement in the Montauk Theatre. The original cast from the Gaiety Theatre will play it, including Clara Blandick, Beatrice Noyes, Eleanor Gordon, Julia Stuart, John Harwood, Charles Mackay and Albert Tavernier.



EMILY FRANCES KOOPER in "OH BOY"

and the new His Majesty's. The new proprietors will, happily enough, begin where Sir Herbert Tree left off, inasmuch as it is their present intention to make their first production in the famous theatre the presentation of the play "The Great Lover," upon the production of which Sir Herbert was actually working at the time of his death. This theatrical affluence is attributable entirely to war influence. There is a constant floating population of many thousand soldiers and sailors on their way to and from the front. The counter attractions of open-air exhibitions, skating rinks and dance halls have been commandered by the Government for storage purposes. Private dances and private parties are tabooed. The theatre remains the only amusement. But where London has gained the smaller towns have suffered disastrously. In all sixty-two plays were presented in London last season. By order



LOUISE GOODY in "7007-7007"

ord unequalled on the London stage for the production of drama. The recipe for its success may be found in the extraordinary attractiveness of the plot and the remarkable acting of Doris Keane. The latter is charmingly modest concerning her triumph. "Just a play that suits me," she claims. "A part I love; that offers so many varieties of acting that I can never grow tired of it." Her manager, Louis Nethercole: "I feel confident that with Miss Keane in the part of Cavalli the play would be successful anywhere in the world."

M. Doris Keane is under contract to act in another play when the run of "Romance" has concluded, after which she will be returning to America. "Seven Days Leave," the financial triumph of the season, is claimed by those responsible as being "a representation of natural everyday scenes, played by familiar everyday characters." And "General Post" that has carried off both artistic and box office laurels, is a good, clean comedy, with an undertone—a serious note running through it. "General Post" is the pick of the three.

Reminiscent of the George Edwards regime, and second only to "The Merry Widow," was the musical comedy "Theodore & Co.," which ran for over eighteen months at the Gaiety. Among other merits it possessed that of popularizing Leslie Henson, the most adaptable and versatile comedian of many years. Henson is now serving with the British Army, but after he war intends visiting America. Eighteen months, however, is no extraordinary period for the run of a musical comedy. The least successful of them usually contrive to dazzle

out over a period of six months. For musical plays are very much the rage in London nowadays. Of twenty-nine theatres, no less than fourteen are presenting musical comedies or revues. Everywhere is expressed this desire for light stuff; catchy tunes, big spectacular scenes, gaily dressed choruses; anything and everything calculated to turn the mind from the grim realities of war. "Ariette," a comic opera, so hit the popular taste that with a five months run to its credit, it is booked for months ahead. "Pamela" embraces one of the most powerful combinations yet presented to the playing public—Lily Eliza and Owen Nares, who have been described as the most handsome pair of lovers ever seen, and G. P. Huntley. "The Boy," founded by Fred Thompson upon Sir Arthur Pinero's famous comedy "The Marriage-Trade," has played to capacity business from the first performance. Even during the two heaviest air raid weeks over \$10,000 was taken on each occasion. In "The Beauty Spot," is London's latest favorite, Miss Regine Eory, an artist of extraordinary versatility and vivacity, who follows easily in the footsteps of the many famous leading ladies who have adorned the Gaiety stage. Her dance with Jan Oyarra in the "Habit" episode is said to be the most sensational yet seen in town. And the most recent of all, "Yes, Uncle," claims the record that \$60,000 worth of seats were sold before the first night.

Some one with an inquisitive turn of mind asked Arthur Hopkins the other day how he chanced to revive Ibsen at this time. Did he consider the time psychological or what elements entered into the making of his decision? "In the modern theatre," said Mr. Hopkins, "one must combine the prac-



FLORENCE MOORE in "PARLOR, BEDROOM and BATH"

tical with the ideal if he would keep the wolf and the Sheriff from the door. This is a lesson I have learned at the cost of \$100,000, or such a matter. "When it became evident that 'The Gipsy Trail' would not last the season out at the Plymouth I began to cast about for a successor. It is no viola-

tion of confidence to state that things with the theatre are not what they have been or will be when the war is over. In New York there have been stretches of good business, but these have been interspersed with lapses of very bad business, and the road is almost impossible. I had several new plays on hand that looked promising in the manuscript, but I did not care to waste one of these on the sag end of a bad season, particularly when a play rarely ever carries through the summer or comes back completely after a vacation.

"The problem then resolved itself into a revival. I had often wanted to do Ibsen, and from the standpoint of the Plymouth, which is a new theatre, and one I am anxious to identify with the better things of the drama, an Ibsen season seemed a particularly happy thought. But would Ibsen at this time prove practical? I knew that there was an Ibsen public that had always proved loyal when the opportunity was presented. 'Ghosts,' when the Washington Square group presented it last spring, scored a veritable triumph. Then I found that I could procure the services of Mrs. Naudron, an actress whose following has never deserted her, and my mind was made up. Also I figured that after a season devoted almost exclusively to the lighter forms of dramatic entertainment the public's taste was about to swing around the cycle to something more substantial.

"So you see I chose Ibsen to satisfy the ideal because it seemed fine thing to do—and the practical—because it promised to prove practical. From the advance interest manifested it would appear that my later premise was correct."

Lee Kugel announces for early production "The Net," a new three act play by Marjorie Thompson, the novelist, whose novels "Persuasion" and "The Woman's Law" had a large sale. Mrs. Thompson is a prominent magazine writer, contributing to McClure's and the American. "The Net" will have a spring opening in May and a week's engagement at the Belasco Theatre in Washington. In the cast will be Isletta Jewel, who retired from the stage three years ago to marry William G. Brown, Governor of West Virginia. Miss Jewel was seen in New York as the leading woman with Otis Skinner. Others in the cast are Charles Milward and Byron Beasley. "The Net" will open in New York early in September. Mr. Kugel also announces the production of a three act comedy by William Rathbun, a new author. A preliminary tryout of this comedy will take place in June and it will open in New York in August. Another production to be taken chiefly by "Morley" is the entirety in interior scenes, depicting the home of a fashionable New York family. Wilfred Buckland, who is responsible for the spectacular settings in the Cecil B. DeMille productions, is personally supervising the furnishing of the interiors used in this joyous vehicle for the acrobatic Douglas.

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