

AT THE NEW YORK THEATERS.



At the top (on the left) is Grace La Rue, in "Betsy," at the Herald Square. At the bottom is Louise Alexander, playing in "Peggy," at the Casino. In the middle is Elsie Ferguson, in "The First Lady in the Land," at the Gaiety, and on the right is Margaret Illington, in "Kindling," at Daly's.

New York, Dec. 9.—To the habitual theatergoer, the man who could rather miss his dinner than have a friend mention a piece that he has not yet seen, the past week is remarkable for its lack of musical comedies. In fact, this is the first week since the opening of the theatrical season that one of more of these light confections whose claim to publicity lies in gauzy plot, tinkling music, and "wit," has not served for the cynosure of the prurient and the antheuma of the blase.

Both the offerings of the week marked more of merit than usual and both were meritorious in widely divergent fields. "The Witness for the Defense" is a rather clever problem play, while "The First Woman of the Land" aims toward comedy success with a surety that seems sure to hit the bull-eye.

"The Witness for the Defense." After a woman's success in London and some two months spent in touring the Middle and Western States, "The Witness for the Defense," by A. E. W. Mason, is judged in New York, at the Empire. The play is strong, with a strength built upon the homicidal elimination of a husband, but it is the masterful mining of the cast rather than the drama itself that holds the audience enthralled and wins hearty commendation.

Among the many roles of this peculiar faror drama, those of A. E. W. Mason, as Henry Thresh, the witness for the defense, and Ethel Barrymore, who plays Stella Ballantine, the husband's murderer, stand forth in bold relief, and closely approach the same of histrionic endeavor. Miss Barrymore is known and loved by thousands who have witnessed her many successes, but in Anson another Englishman has been discovered whose character work will make for him an enviable reputation.

"The Witness for the Defense" seeks to expunge from the pastimes of England's elite the time-honored sport of wife beating, which in itself is an aim to be commended, but in Anson another Englishman has been discovered whose character work will make for him an enviable reputation.

Stella Ballantine and her husband Stephen are members of that portion of English society whose husbands are the Indian dependencies and whose personal inclinations point toward family rows as a pleasant means of whiling away the long Indian evenings. Mr. Mason portrays the husband in the order of the aggressor, ascribing to him all the brutal characteristics that sway drink-soaked blazes, and so well does he execute the part that his audience are apt to overlook the axiomatic saying: "There are two sides to every question," and condone the wife, who in the natural order of events must, in some measure, have been to blame.

At any rate, it is here that Henry Thresh, a London barrister and former lover, enters into the scene, only to witness the brutal statement of Mrs. Ballantine at the hands of her insulting husband. The scene draws to a close. The lawyer leaves and Mrs. Ballantine, smothering under her conjugal exhortation, decides to take her life, but is surprised by Thresh returning for his pipe, and later turns the gun upon her husband.

In the succeeding acts, a lapse of time has bridged her trial for murder in Bombay, where she was acquitted by the jury, and she is now in London, where she falls in love with a young Englishman, who asks her hand in marriage. It is here that the shadow of her crime, through Thresh's insistence that she acknowledge her guilt to her new lover, looms large and threatens to wreck her romance. The situation is tense with possibility. The husband's hand in marriage. It is here that the shadow of her crime, through Thresh's insistence that she acknowledge her guilt to her new lover, looms large and threatens to wreck her romance. The situation is tense with possibility.

"The First Lady of the Land." It is needless to say that the affair ends well. Theater patrons, backed by the weight of popular demand, hold a club above the head of the playwright that permits him little latitude. But, though Stella wins her second wedding ring through the condonation of her murder, the fact does not ring true, and Mason's extension of crime, the murder beautiful, deserves a high place in the morbid catalogue.

It is surprising that more playwrights do not interest themselves in the opportunities afforded by the many heroic figures buried in the graveyard of United States history. To a commonwealth whose patriotism is famed around the world, plays of this order, if graced with merit and mined by artists, must ever hold uncommon interest. Of such fabric is "The First Lady of the Land," at the Gaiety, woven, and, through Charles Dreyfus, the author, has taken rather startling liberties with history. Miss Elsie Ferguson and a cast par excellence

give an entertainment that will appeal to every class of theater patron. Miss Ferguson has the role of Dolly Madison, nee Todd, a child and widow of the Quakers, and she epitomizes and repeats her way through four acts of resurrected history dealing with the events that moved with Burr, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison. Mistress Todd, of course, is the center of the story. She is shown as the object of the love of Aaron Burr and Madison, who come to woo her in a quiet Philadelphia boarding-house.

Burr has just been defeated for the Presidency by Jefferson, and has received her promise to marry, when she finds that he is to fight his duel with Alexander Hamilton. Mistress Todd exacts a promise that he refuse to harm his adversary on the field of honor, and on the death of Hamilton breaks off her engagement and favors Madison.

"Compliments follow. The scene shifts to Washington, where Mistress Madison's humor leads the wits of the times a merry chase, with kaleidoscopic interjections of Spanish ambassadors unlike anything Spanish, even a Spanish onion, and Burr's plot to conquer Mexico, in which Mistress Madison's name is involved, and ends with the arrest of Burr for treason.

The play has its good points and seems to be well liked, but after all is said it is Miss Ferguson in whom the interest centers. Miss Ferguson and Nirdlinger's pleasing presentation of America's heroic characters.

Hammerstein in London. Miss Felice Lyne has taken London by storm, and the faith that Oscar Hammerstein has long had in her has been fully justified. She appeared in the role of Gilda in "Rigoletto." Now, among the causes of her success is the fact that she looked the part of the young daughter of the disreputable old jester in Verdi's world opera. Age and weight have neither been taken into consideration in the casting of a "Rigoletto," and the heaviest and the oldest prima donna usually romped in with Gilda. But Miss Lyne is a dainty little thing, as the heroine in "Hans, the Flute Player."

At that time, and it is not so long ago, she gave distinct promise of material success in the line of endeavor typified by "Hans, the Flute Player." Operatic life is full of surprise and Miss Lyne has battered all promise. That she has stamped London there is no doubt. The newspapers of that city are not much given to extravagant praise, but in description of Miss Lyne they are unanimous in eulogy.

By this same token, Mr. Hammerstein's London season is morally and critically a success. He has succeeded in exciting general interest in his new venture. Every one knows that there is in London a vast public for all sorts of amusements. The experiences of Buffalo Bill and Phineas Taylor Barnum are proofs of this. But for many years past London has been indifferent even to such opera as it had.

That Mr. Hammerstein should have roused London from that sluggish apathy as regards the lyric stage is a tribute to his restless energy, his staunch Napoleonic belief in himself and his methods. Within the past four years he has brought it about that three cities—New York, Philadelphia, and London—supported two operas instead of one. He has also built an imposing opera house in each of them. Paris and Berlin still remain, as also Moscow and Constantinople.

Gibson's New Play. Preston Gibson has received word from his agents in Paris that his one-act play, "The Vacuum," is to be produced this winter at the Grand Guignol, in Paris. This is the first time that an American playwright has ever had a one-act play produced at this world-famous theater. "The Vacuum," which was produced in New York last season, has been reworked to some extent, and the front of the cabinet, in which the husband loses the lover, when he finds him with his wife, is to be of glass in order that the audience may witness the suffocation of the men. Mr. Gibson also has leased "The Vacuum" to the London music halls.

"The Secret Way," a new comedy by Mr. Gibson, is now running at Keith's Theater in New York, and is booked on the circuit. The Washington friends of Mr. Gibson were surprised when they learned of the existence of this play. No one had ever been advised of its production. Mr. Gibson also has under way several short acts for production at the Playhouse here this winter.

AMERICAN VOCALISM.

"America is the great voice producing country of the world. Only Austria is turning out singers of unusual like equal quality, and not nearly in such quantity." Putnam Griswold, the American basso, said when asked his opinion of Felice Lyne, the little American soprano, who has swept opera-going Londoners off their feet. He has been singing abroad for several years and made a successful Metropolitan Opera House debut as Hagan in "Götter-Dämmerung" last week.

"I do not know Miss Lyne," Mr. Griswold said. "And I have not heard her sing, but I see no reason to question the judgment of Londoners. They have heard, as New Yorkers have heard, the greatest singers in the world, and the English critics usually are sound musical taste and conservative writers. Miss Lyne's triumph is only one illustration of my point. American singers are making their way abroad, often in the face of great prejudice and jealousy."

"Our need in America is a national conservatory of music. What are our rich philanthropists thinking about that they do not establish one? There is honor and glory and national appreciation for the man who will found one. Why should our young men and women students be driven to Europe to study singing?"

"Another thing we need in America is opera in English. Why do not some wealthy men combine to give first-class grand opera in the vernacular? 'Do I believe' the climate responsible for the superiority of the American voice? Well, hardly, because our successful singers come from all over the country, from Maine to Texas and from New York to California. Within those boundaries the climate is as varied as that of all Europe."

"We are weak in the line of tenors, you say. Well, I don't know. Riccardo Martin is singing most successfully at the Metropolitan. George Hamlin and Ellison Van Hoose are making good with Mr. D'Almeida's company, and Francis MacLennan is famous on the Continent for his lovely voice. Remember that young New Yorker, Lambert Murphy, who sang at the Metropolitan in 'Lobelia' the other day? Hark! he has beautiful voice!"

Following are the names of some of the famous American singers recalled by Mr. Griswold: In the Metropolitan Opera company, Gertrude Farrar, Olive Fremstad, Marie Rappold, Alma Gluck, Bernice De Pasquall, Alice Nielsen, Helga Pernia, Anna Case, Louise Homer, Florence Wickham, Marietta Aldega, Lilla Svingberg, Henrietta Wakefield, Helga Mapeleson, Riccardo Martin, Lambert Murphy, William Hinshaw, Putnam Griswold, Basil Ruysdael, and Herbert Witherspoon.

With the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera company, Mary Garden, Carolina White, Jane Osborn-Hannah, Marie Cavan, Mabel Reikeman, Eleonora De Cisneros, George Hamlin, Ellison Van Hoose, Clarence Whitcomb, and Henri Scott.

There are several who were connected formerly with either the Metropolitan Opera company or the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera company, such as Lillian Nordica, Emma Eames, Marguerite Sylva, David Bispham, Robert Blass, and Edward Hincley.

Among the American singers abroad, besides Felice Lyne, Mr. Griswold off-hand recalled Edith Walker, singing at Hamburg; Mrs. Charles Cahier and Henry Miller, in Vienna; Frances Rose, Florence Easton, Francis MacLennan and Barton Furnell, in Berlin; Maud Fay and Marcela Kreft at Munich; Leon Raina and Paul Petre at Dresden and George Meader at Stuttgart.

Bear Plays 'Possum. Frank Hamlin, a rancher living between Sheridan and Carlton, O., was one of the principals in an exciting hunting incident this week. Hamlin ran onto a large black bear suddenly. The hunter was cool enough to get a good standing, shot at the bear, and to all appearances killed the animal. Upon going up to examine his prize victim, which had fallen as if quite dead, Hamlin was taken off his guard by a snarl effecting a quick and unexpected revival.

MISS GARDEN AND THE FOGIES

Miss Mary Garden, with the charming frankness which is one of the chief joys of contemporaneous existence, has informed the universe that opera cannot possibly succeed in New York because of the pernicious activity of the New York music critics.

"Down there," says Miss Garden, meaning New York, "they have a lot of old fogies who were in their prime, if they ever had a prime, when Wagner was first sung in America. They discourage the work of young artists and drive the old frantic. The New York critics are the most senseless writers in the world."

Armed with this piece of amiable candor I journeyed up into the wilds about 15th street and discovered Henry Edward Krebblie, the dean and the Jupiter Tonans of the local musical critics, wreathed in the vapors of a fine cigar and also engaged on an essay entitled, "How to listen to counterpoint; or Back to Bach."

The score of "Fidelio" stood open on the piano, and a fine portrait of Da Ponte, Mozart's librettist, adorne the foreground. He read the perennial extract from the local musical critics, wreathed in the vapors of a fine cigar and also engaged on an essay entitled, "How to listen to counterpoint; or Back to Bach."

Mr. Krebblie was then asked if he was actually writing when Wagner was first sung in America. This he refused to affirm or deny on the ground that no man could be called on to incriminate himself. J. Handerson, who in point of years of service is also a bit decanal, was characteristically laconic. "Miss Garden," he was understood to say, "is from the north of Scotland. I am from the south. The south of Scotland is used to raids from the north."

Then he buried himself in the records of Italian opera before the age of Tubal Cain. Max Smith, of the Press, is growing a pompadour and found no time to devote at present to controversy. Three of the younger critics were then discovered in the Harvard Club. They were J. Pitt Sanborn, Carl Van Vechten, and the Sieur Grenville de Vernon. They were asked if they were old fogies. They affected indifference to the slights of the Miss Tinseltown Garden. With their lightness of humor and that quick resourcefulness natural in Harvard men Mr. Vernon seized a copy of the Harvard Crimson and twining it into a trumpet, quickly improvised a simple melisma in the diatonic scale. With equal promptitude Mr. Sanborn wrote down the words:

Let the galled jade wince, our withers are weary. We see in our cradles when Tristan first was sung. We are old fogies, yet we scarce now are young. (Mr. Garden, will you never still that tongue?) These affecting words were sung in canon.

Carl Van Vechten sustained the chief part—to use the musical vocabulary of the times—with superb pronunciation of the dignified musical beauty of the composition itself, together with a virtuosity of treatment as indubitably persuasive as it was instructive with aspirations for the Charles Henry Meltzer also deprecated the harsh phrase "old fogie."

But what and Sylvester Rawling, the Apollo from Solihull, by the side of Devon, he who was nursed to the sound of lofty music chanted by loud roaring sea? What in Virgilian phrase did he congregate when he read the cruel inventive? He simply gathered all his forces into one terrific monosyllable. He said "Bats."

Thus did he confront the horticultural and damatory zoologies—Morning Telegraph.

Walnut Log 350 Feet Underground. A walnut log in a fine state of preservation was found to-day 350 feet under the surface of the ground on a farm in McPherson County, S. W. Beahler, a farmer, was drilling a well when the log was encountered. The tree, more than a foot in diameter, is supposed to have sunk to the bank of the big sea or lake that once covered Central Kansas.

The only part of this lake remaining is the basin west of McPherson. The tree had not become fossilized but was just the natural wood as though it had fallen yesterday. It must have taken thousands of years, local scientists say, for the 350 feet of soil, sand, and shale to accumulate above the log.

The cotton industry of England employs many more women than men.

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