

# First Nights at the Theatres

## LESSONS IN LIFE FROM THE NEW WORKS OF PLAYWRIGHTS

Realism in the Gambling Scene in "The Wheel" and the Easiest Way Made Attractive in Fannie Hurst's "Back Pay."

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

A CORRESPONDENT has small respect for the critic of acting who would praise an actor for his artistry and yet dwell on the humor that may reside in his sly glances at the audience.

"A dramatic artist," he protests, "ignores the public. An audience does not exist for him. It is contradiction in terms to commend an actor for creating his effects in this way and yet refer to him as an artist."

The point is almost well taken. The discussion is not new. Purists often shudder in print or life at such a liberty on the part of a player. Yet there is the highest authority for this adjustment of a means to an end. The subject has, moreover, occupied the thoughts of the actors themselves. The best theories on the subject have come from the players. They are not safe judges of plays, but they are some-ones able to speak interestingly on their own phase of the theatre.

In his memoirs, which Lester Wallack wrote for a magazine in the late '80s, he described his own lack of certainty on the subject. Whether or not he was artistically justified in taking the audience into his confidence by a wink or a smile, was a matter about which he was not always sure. But he continued to make use of the device with unflinching effect but with same artistic scruples. It was then that he played with Charles Mathews and observed his quite conscientious employment of the device. So he sought justification from the older and more famous actor, who imparted his own theories to him in a few short but comforting phrases. In effect, Mathews told him that he never had seen a comedian of any reputation who had not relied on the cooperation of his audience to such an extent that he wholeheartedly acknowledged its existence by a smile or a nod or a comprehensive glance when it seemed to him that the situation allowed it. In Mathews's opinion, the trick was an earnestly justified indulgence of the comedian's artistic privilege.

But the actor must be a comedian. No dignified player of serious roles would, in his opinion, have been allowed by the most elastic principles to intimate the possession of the knowledge that an audience sat before him. He must not see across the footlights. His world is rigidly bounded by the stage. Across its frontiers he dares not pass. But this is the limitation in the opinion of more famous players than the two mentioned here of only the serious actor. It is indispensable to the success of the comedian that a rapport should be established between him and his public.

So according to the testimony of various credible authorities it is altogether permissible to call Henry E. Dixey in "Personality" a genuine artist and to admit complete surrender to the humor of his roving eye. To deny the name of artist to him for his habit would exclude some other highly esteemed comedians. Look at the irresistible Laurette Taylor, at John Drew, the polished William Collier and, well, almost any really funny actor you want to mention.

### Mr. Smith as Realist.

Since David Belasco pictured the microscopic life of a hotel lobby in "The Women" there has been nothing so realistic as Winchell Smith's moving photograph of a fashionable gambling room, which is the background for the third act of "The Wheel." The scene might be described as the last word in such temples of chance. It is no three story brown stone front nestling under the shadow of a large hotel. No non-committal lace curtains hypocritically veil its garish splendor. No private door from the hotel affords entrance to the visiting hick, while the outward and visible sign of law and order patrols, in his dark blue authority, the sidewalk in front. There is no such antediluvian character to Mr. Smith's picture. He has drawn the kind of a temple of chance which appeals only to the local sinner. It is, indeed, as if one had to be actually socially registered to get in at all.

Expert and most polite croupiers stand behind the tables over which the old rose shaded electric lights dispense a sufficient but not dazzling glow. The black servant—he was the genuine article beyond all power of grease paint and burnt cork to create—slyly eavesdrops in out of the room dispensing the cup which seemed, in the case of the protagonist, to inebriate without in the least cheering. Pocketing the tips of a size in proportion to the rate at which large sums were exchanged—with rather monotonous advantage in favor of the house—he disappeared without the audacity to smile but with the courtesy to exude a quite sensible gratitude.

The barred door which opened quickly on the understood signal; the speaking tube into unseen but obviously important regions; the substantial looking but unobtrusive dealers said to be old graduates of this now somewhat less careful college of the obsequious manner with his dinner coat and his manner of being about equally interested in all his guests—these realistic elements combined to create a scene full of interesting detail.

### The Pains-taking Dramatist.

In the circumstances it is not possible to escape a sense of surprise that the frenzied passion which seized the hero did not move the spectators more deeply when they saw the last of his fortune slipping from his trembling fingers as he sat at the roulette table. Nor did the sudden entrance of his wife as the owner of the resort—obviously a "situation" on which the playwright had counted heavily—stir the emotions of the spectators. Perhaps the slight with which Mr. Smith had alternated his speeches with the turning of the wheel and the second of silence in which the ball dropped into its final resting place to precede the knell of the player as it fell from the impassive lips of the dealer were points too technical to impress the casual spectator. Yet they served as evidence of the care with which the dramatist has piled word upon word and deed upon deed to make effective an act which evoked interest only through the truth of its detail to the reality.

It used to be a theory of the theatre that the gambler could not be made a sympathetic figure on the stage. Probably this was the result of the attempt to utilize on the stage the characters of Bret Harte's fiction. At all events, it needed only a few successful plays to put an end to this theory. Like all stage superstitions, it took only these examples of its futility to end its power. It was certainly dim-

cult to feel any throb of interest in the young man so deliberately destroying his own happiness as well as that of his altogether blameless wife by his mad indulgence at the table. If it is to be said that such a passion in this form is madness, then there is certainly to be no response in pity to his sufferings. No author has asked his public to share in the sufferings of a demented hero.

Mr. Smith is one of the most expert of American playwrights. He not only works according to the dictates of the mandarin but he possesses the extreme wisdom to adapt these means to modern uses. The most hidebound advocate of the well made play would never dare urge the acceptance of its rules without consideration of present day standards. Other times, other ways. Maybe in his mastery of the best methods of the playwrights Mr. Smith will devise some means of sending the blood of life coursing through the veins of a play which, at least on its first performance, uncommonly weak in circulation to be the work of such a skilled dramatist.

### Live and Learn in the Theatre.

Not all the education in social life which the theatre offered last week was confined to the evils of a passion for games of chance. Miss Fannie Hurst in "Back Pay," which A. H. Woods presented at the Eltinge Theatre, did her bit toward telling the world something about the fauna of Riverside Drive. There settled Miss Hurst's little gold digger after she had parted from the drummer who gave her a pink near silk chemise to come with him on the 8:30 train to New York. It was during the second act that the habits of this interesting West Side dweller were most eloquently revealed.

It seems that a summer home is not to be underrated, since it counts as real estate, city or country. It should stand next in the list of investments to pearls and other precious stones. Chinchilla is only second choice for a wrap, since a Russian sable for \$25,000 is practically the only sure protection against the chills of winter. An evening dress—the heroine's was of cloth of gold—costs \$1,000, and her gentleman friend, who had every reason in the world for taking the keenest interest in the amount of her bills, was horrified that even the cheapest of tea gowns cannot be had for less than \$270.

Miss Hurst does not stop her education of the public with such material objects. It seems that the gold diggers have to suffer in order to acquire these luxuries. One of the heroine's neighbors, who even walked about the halls in lace pajamas edged with gold braid, admitted that she had as a result of the party the night before "a dark brown taste" in her mouth that grew steadily worse. Whether or not this possession is accounted by Miss Hurst as an asset among her fascinations was not made clear. The fact was merely presented. Another complaining reveller's trouble was with an "awful head." In view of the intensely physical character of these complaints it seemed as if many sympathetic listeners as if gold diggers came high.

### The Old Stenels.

In "Back Pay" the authoress has resisted bravely the temptation to talk about the injustice of one law for women and another for men, although one of the guests at dinner did have a brief outbreak attributed to the effects of a hang over from the day he had been able to recover during the day despite the acquisition of a chinchilla coat.

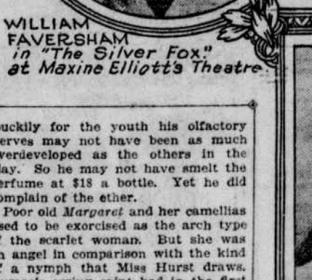
There are no apologies for any of the characters in "Back Pay" least of all for the heroine. She is a coldly calculating young person who prefers to do business in New York than to stir at home where life is rather drab and the game is possibly not worth the candle. Miss Hurst makes no effort later to justify her. To be sure she is in view of the convenience of his blindness enabled to take the boy lover back to her home where he may not see what is going on about him.



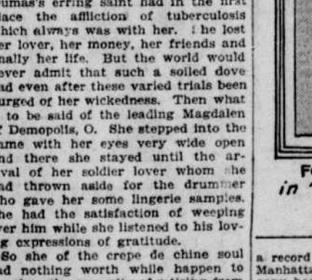
Miss INA CLAIRE in "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife" at the Ritz Theatre.



Miss LYDIA LIPKOWSKA and REGINALD CASCH in "The Merry Widow" at Knickerbocker.



WILLIAM FAVERSHAM in "The Silver Fox" at Maxine Elliott's Theatre.



FOKINA in Ballet in "Get Together" at The Hippodrome.



Miss STELLA MORRISSEY in "Jingle Jangle" at Columbia.



Miss FRANCES STAR in "The Easiest Way" at Lyceum.



Miss FANIA MARINOFF in "The Hero" at Belmont.

Luckily for the youth his olfactory nerves may not have been as much overdeveloped as the others in the play. So he may not have smelt the perfume at \$18 a bottle. Yet he did complain of the ether.

Poor old Margaret and her camellias used to be excoriated as the arch type of the scarlet woman. But she was an angel in comparison with the kind of a nymph that Miss Hurst draws. Dumas's erring saint had in the first place the affliction of tuberculosis which always was with her. I lost her lover, her money, her friends and finally her life. But the world would never admit that such a soiled dove had even after these varied trials been purged of her wickedness. Then what is to be said of the leading Magdalen of Demopolis, O. She stepped into the game with her eyes very wide open and there she stayed until the arrival of her soldier lover whom she had thrown aside for the drummer who gave her some lingerie samples. She had the satisfaction of weeping over him while she listened to his loving expressions of gratitude.

So she of the crepe de chine soul had nothing worth while happen to her than the necessity of retiring from a world in which the dark brown taste and the head were the distinguishing marks of the women folk. Miss Hurst makes no effort to defend this heroine unless it be that in the end she prefers a slim young soldier to her over-nourished satyr as a companion. This is a play that paints harlotry in its most beguiling colors. If anybody is ever affected by evil or she is too weak to deserve any better fate.

"Back Pay" might well serve to increase the army of gold diggers and workers in allied industries, so alluring does Miss Hurst make the profession appear. Propaganda? Of course not, and then that word has ceased to be used except in connection with the name of a mid-European country to which it appears welded for all eternity. It is not enough excuse for a girl that she hate the odor of cold potatoes and the sight of a dead duck being dragged in its accumulated mould from under a back piazza, and heard the rustle of something in her veins that sounds like silk. Yet these personal traits are suggested by the playwright by way of apology.

### Plays to Be Seen in Brooklyn Theatres

A. H. Woods will present at the Majestic Theatre for the coming week, starting with a holiday matinee on Labor Day, the farce, "Ladies Night," which scored for more than a year at the Eltinge Theatre, Manhattan. This farce is from the pens of Avery Hopwood and Charlton Andrews. Supporting John Arthur in the lead are Charles Ruggles, Allyn Kline, Evelyn Gomel, Clara Byrne Foster, Edward Douglas and Mrs. Stuart Robson.

Milton Nobles will remain at the Montauk for a second week in "Lightnin'," the comedy by Frank Bacon and Winchell Smith, which has just finished

a record run at the Gaiety Theatre in Manhattan. A large and competent company has been provided to support him by John Golden.

Daphne Pollard will top the bill at the Orpheum. Others will be Harry Kahne, Joe Darcy and Claudia Coleman.

Whipple, Huston and company, Ivan Bankoff and Elinore and Williams will be the headliners at the Bushwick.

Irving and Jack Kaufman will lead the bill at the Boro Park.

George Arlis in "Disraeli" will be the photoplay feature at the Strand.

Emma Carus and Charles Withers will

be the headliners at the New Brighton. Others will be Harry Delf, George Bobbe and Eddie Nelson, Miss Mabel Burke and Miss Helen Bell Bush.

The Star, recently renovated, will be reopened with "The Crown-Up Babies," headed by Bob Nugent and Manny Besser.

TWO PLAYS ON THE MOVE.

Two plays change their Broadway location to-morrow night. "The Detour," Owen Davis's realistic drama at the Astor Theatre, will move to the Bijou. The first performance at the Bijou will be given at the special matinee to-morrow. "March Hares," which has been for several weeks at the Bijou, will remove to the Punch and Judy.

## Five New Plays and Two Revivals

**MONDAY.**  
KNICKERBOCKER THEATRE—Henry W. Savage will offer for seven weeks only a new production of "The Merry Widow," Lehár's operetta. Lydia Lipkowska, Russian soprano, formerly of the Chicago Opera Company, will sing the Widow's role. Reginald Casch, tenor of the Rembrandt Theatre, Amsterdam, will be the Prince. Miss Dorothy Francis, Jefferson De Angelle, Frank Webster and Georges Du France of Paris have important roles. A special dancing number will be given by Cecile D'Andrea, ballerina at La Scala, Milan, and Harry Walters of the Chicago Art Institute.

**GARIBOLDI THEATRE**—Henri Batallie's "Don Juan (L'Homme a la Rose)," seen in Paris last season, will be presented with Lou Tellegen in the title role. The English version is by Lawrence Langner. The play is under the management of Frank Reicher and the Selwyns. The cast includes Miss Theresa Maxwell Conover, Miss Mary Moore and Miss Alison Bradshaw.

**MAXINE ELLIOTT'S THEATRE**—Lee Shubert will present William Faversham in a new comedy by Cosmo Hamilton, "The Silver Fox," freely adapted from a work by Ferenc Herczeg. The cast includes Lawrence Grossmith and Miss Violet Kemble Cooper. The central figure is the wife of a popular novelist, living in the suburbs of London.

**BELMONT THEATRE**—Sam H. Harris will offer Gilbert Emery's play, "The Hero," with Richard Bennett featured. The same play was presented last spring at special matinees. Others in the play are Robert Ames, Miss Alma Belwin and Miss Fania Marinoff.

**TUESDAY.**  
LYCEUM THEATRE—David Belasco will begin his season by reintroducing Miss Frances Star in "The Easiest Way," Eugene Walter's American play. Joseph Kilgour and Miss Laura Nelson Hall will appear in their original parts of "Willard Brocton and Elsie St. Clair."

**WEDNESDAY.**  
BROADHURST THEATRE—George Broadhurst will present "Farsan of the Apes," postponed from last week.

**THURSDAY.**  
RITZ THEATRE—William Harris, Jr., will present Miss Ina Claire in "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife," a farce by Alfred Savoir, adapted by Charlton Andrews. The story tells how a dominant American, John Brundson, with charm to win seven women and money enough to divorce them, meets in a French resort Mousa, the daughter of a Marquis, and marries her. Miss Claire plays Mousa, and the part of Brandon is played by Claude King.

## Carnival Programmes At the Seaside Parks

At George C. Tilyou's Steeplechase Park, Coney Island, a large crowd daily enjoys the many attractions of the "funny place." A special programme is being arranged for the period of the Mardi Gras, during the week of September 12 to 18, and tons of confetti, miles of carnival streamers, as well as thousands of souvenirs, will be presented to the visitors during the week. The swimming pools will be open to the public during this month and October.

Luna Park is also making ready for Coney's carnival, tuning up all the various thrilling rides and shows.

Palisades Amusement Park is still standing by its inland ocean and the warm weather of the last week has made this delightful pool, with its beach and artificial surf, attractive to thousands.

Starlight Amusement Park, at East 177th street subway station in The Bronx, will present what it calls its red letter week. There will be something doing almost every minute, morning, noon and night, in the big twenty-eight acre fun reservation of The Bronx. At 8 each morning the swimming pool will be open for the swimmer who takes joy in a crisp, invigorating September morning plunge. The finale in the swimming events of the different local athletic organizations will be swum out during the week according to schedule.

## TRIALS OF ARBUCKLE.

It must be rather exciting, but also quite nerve racking to live with Fatty Arbuckle, whom some people insist on calling "Roscoe." The mammoth comedian is always practicing new tricks and falls for his pictures in his home at Los Angeles, and he and the furniture are hardly on speaking terms.

In one picture, "The Life of the Party," he rehearsed a fall, intended to be almost disastrous from a skyscraper window, at his home for several weeks before it satisfied his artistic sensibilities. But Fatty doesn't really enjoy being smeared on the floor in this way. "Those directors," he protests, "seem to think I like being bumped in my roles. They feel I ought to like it because they like it. But I don't—after all I don't take the jar of the spine, even if rubber heels do."

## BURLESQUE AT COLUMBIA.

The regular season at the Columbia Theatre will begin to-morrow afternoon. Thereafter the house will return to its established policy of weekly changes of show, with daily matinees. The initial attraction is a new two act burlesque called, "Jingle Jangle," produced by I. H. Herk, who is one of the recent acquisitions of the Columbia Amusement Company. Among the players are Harry Stepp, Harry O'Neal, Stella Morrissey, Margie Coates, Eileen Ramsey, Eddie Murray, Frank Hughes and Billy Parrella. During this week the Columbia has been closed the house has been thoroughly renovated and redecorated.

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Imported sweaters, up to \$55.00  
Sports hats, velours, felts, tweeds and velvets . . . \$10.00 up  
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Wool scarfs of alpaca, Scotch wool, cashmere and camel's hair—many styles and color combinations . . . \$3.50 up  
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