

Tales and Tidings of the Theater

THE REVIEWING STAND

By Alexander Woollcott

PROPHECY in the theater is the most footless of pastimes, but it is fairly easy to predict some things. It is fairly easy, for instance, to predict some of the things that will be said by this person or that the morning after John Barrymore, now crouching in readiness to storm his last trench, appears in our town next month as the Prince of Denmark. It will be said that he is the foremost American actor and also that his performance can hardly compare with that which Samuel Phelps gave at the Theater Royal, Upper Tooting, in April, 1843. It will be said either that the settings by Robert Edmond Jones are incomparably lovely or that they are hopelessly out of tune with the Shakespearean spirit. There will be several hearty, gracious observations to the effect that, after all and say what you will, "Hamlet" is a mighty good play. Good ole "Hamlet." And, as a sort of regretful afterthought, it will probably be added that the supporting company is unworthy of the play and unworthy of the star.

This last stricture will be expressed with considerable severity, quite as though any shortcomings were a bit of wanton perversity on the part of the trying Arthur Hopkins. But it is one thing to dream the perfect cast and quite another to corral it. It seems probable, for instance, that he would enjoy directing, as we should enjoy seeing, a careful, unmediated, non-archaeological production of "Hamlet" with the following cast:

Claudius.....Lionel Barrymore  
Gertrude.....Mrs. Patrick Campbell  
Hamlet.....John Barrymore  
Ophelia.....Peggy Wood  
Laertes.....McKay Morris  
Horatio.....Basil Sidney  
Polonius.....J. M. Kerrigan  
The Ghost.....George Gault  
The First Gravedigger.....Henry Travers  
The Player King.....Howard Kyle  
The Player Queen.....George Le Guere  
Rosencrantz.....Lowell Sherman  
Guildenstern.....Henry Hull

Now it is worth noting that even if Arthur Hopkins were endowed by Otto Kahn and were sustained by four times his present considerable prestige and by at least eight times his present stock of persuasiveness, he could not engage that cast for "Hamlet" this season. For one thing, several of the players are bound hand and foot by contracts to appear indefinitely in other enterprises. Then one of them will not consider any play for which he cannot himself nominate his fellow players. Another would have the vapors at the very thought of accepting a secondary role. And still another, no doubt, would think it just a little degrading to submit to the direction of a producer who, at the very start, had not sense enough to see that the company contemplated John Barrymore ought really to be second choice for Hamlet.

So it goes. So, in fact, it usually goes. It is not such a difficult task to cast a play perfectly in the little theater of our mind. But you find, when it comes time to call the first rehearsal, that Elmer Storm, whom you had envisaged as just the fellow to play your tramp, has himself written a romance in which he intends to appear personally as the handsome young Prince Stanislas—"Her Dream Prince," by and with Elmer Storm. You find that Henry Wike, who had been so startlingly good as the cockney bookmaker in "Beavers in Blighty," is now exposing himself in a cowboy comedy and hopelessly, pathetically strutting his h's all over the Western plains. And as for Harrietta Fuller (born in Canandaigua, N. Y., May 12, 1872) you had fondly counted on her to play the twenty-one-year-old bride. But Miss Fuller declines, for she has never been quite able to make up her mind to admit being older than eighteen.

Indeed, it is so maddeningly difficult to round up the very actors you would prefer for any one production that the favorite argument against a repertory theater always sounds a trifle hollow and unconvincing to us. That argument against a standing, resident company, of course, is that it is too rigid a thing—that the producer should be free to cast his nets in all the seven seas. Well, he is and he does. But what fish? What fish!

Why, the best point we ever heard scored in favor of the repertory idea popped out mutiniously in an argument that Mrs. Fiske was waging against that idea—an argument set forth in a book written by some negligible, ink stained wretch to express that great lady's views on matters of the stage. And in the very midst of her airy contention that, in this age of specialization, every play deserved its carefully and specially assembled cast, lo! she admitted that only once in twenty-five years of such procedure had she achieved a cast that satisfied her as right throughout.

After all, it was the dazzling Emily Stevens who, in a moody moment, said the last word on the subject. "You have delusions of grandeur when you start to cast your play," said she. "But by the time the first rehearsal is called you feel thankful if they're all white."

Speaking of Arthur Hopkins and the casting of plays, as one must from time to time, attention should really be called to the recent sharp exchange of sallies between himself and Ludwig Lewisohn. It is the Lewisohn translation of "Rose Bernd" which is being used at the Longacre, and it was an interesting phenomenon of the theater that, after seeing the Hopkins production, Dr. Lewisohn, in his capacity as dramatic critic of *The Nation*, grasped his first opportunity to air his views of that production. They were not flattering. Indeed, it was as scalding and corrosive a piece as we have encountered in many a day—a magnificent essay in scorn. In the main, we sympathize with his criticism. It did scant justice to the full magnificence of Ethel Barrymore's performance and it seemed to us almost ludicrously astray in its estimate of the qualities which McKay Morris brought to *Streckmann*. But in the main it was sound and, in its severest passages, it was inescapable.

Its publication elicited an extraordinary outburst from Mr. Hopkins himself, who, to do him justice, has seldom done his sulking in public. His letter—it cannot accurately be called a reply—is slyly printed by *The Nation* without comment. Here it is in full:

Have read with considerable interest Mr. Lewisohn's review of my production of "Rose Bernd." Disregarding its peevish superiority, it would seem that Mr. Lewisohn is suffering from an attack of acute preconception. With a single glance at the program, he knew the whole interpretation was doomed to failure. And, of course, so far as he was concerned, it was. He wanted it to be. He would rather have died than come out with one preconception violated. All may have been lost, but he left the theater clutching to his heart his preconceptions, and now he waves them, bruised but aloft, and in his burning defense of them conveys to us the amazing information that Hauptmann is a great dramatist and "Rose Bernd" is a play of compassion. And back of it all is a patronizing sadness for those poor souls who can never know how wonderful it all is.

This is the sort of popcock that retards the American theater. It is the frantic little Lewisohns running about in circles, whispering of the preciousness of this and the very subtle, ungraspable significance of that, who manage to disseminate the belief that the great things of the theater can only be understood by the few.

It has been proved time and again in the theater that the only audience that is much confused by greatness is the first audience, and that because it is largely burdened with preconceptions. The later audiences, who come only to be moved and not to be vindicated, have no difficulty in grasping the full significance of the play, and they need no Lewisohn with pointer in hand to stand before them and say, "Now, here, children, you will note that the author has intended to convey that the fate of Rose Bernd was implicated with that of three men."

It is the inferiority complex screaming for air. It is only interesting in Mr. Lewisohn's case because he is a type. There are swarms of him buzzing around the theater retarding and holding back those who would rather do things for the theater than talk about it. And the sad part of it all is that his kind is well intentioned and no one has yet found an exterminator for the pest of good intentions.

ARTHUR HOPKINS.

This letter really speaks for itself—saying a few things, by the way, which its writer appears not to have contemplated. All the same, it is undeniably tempting to make a few remarks about it.

We should like to point out, for instance, that however one might wish to bring the mental *tabula rasa* which Mr. Hopkins seems to yearn for to his first nighters, it is going to be difficult to manage in the case



Wilda Bennett in "The Lady in Ermine" at the Ambassador.

of his "Hamlet," for quite a number of us have either read, seen or heard tell of that piece. Then suppose that after all Mr. Hopkins does get round to reviving "Peter Pan," as rumor persists in announcing he will do. If on that occasion the most conscientiously vacuous among the first nighters should find, on consulting the program, that he had cast Dudley Digges as Wendy, it is going to be quite a strain for them to prevent a preconception from welling up within their bosoms.

We also feel that the foregoing letter comes with peculiarly ill grace from the producer who owes so much of his present prestige and its attendant freedom to the admiring gabble of men, who, having no plays to write and no gift at staging them, were content to accept the role of drum beaters in front of his booth. We have just reread the letter to see what answer it makes to Dr. Lewisohn's specific charge that Hopkins had outrageously miscast a great play. It makes none. When you can't think of any answer to a stinging criticism of what you are or what you have done, it is a good rule to reach deep into your vocabulary and take out that sonorous old phrase "the inferiority complex." If your adversary is a modest, soft spoken fellow, you can say he is suffering from one. If, on the other hand, he is bold, haughty and contemptuous, you can say he is concealing one. You have the fellow going and coming.

CONCERNING "THE FOOL"

THE old, old question as to what would befall Christ if His second coming brought Him to our town in our day—this question Channing Pollock asked of his own heart and, listening to the answer, put it in a play called "The Fool." This is the rousing, thwacking, unblushingly theatrical piece which is now being acted so admirably at the Times Square Theater. It is worth noting how it came by its name. Last spring Pollock read the piece to Samuel Hopkins Adams, to whom it would naturally appeal strongly because of the gusto with which it bludgeons the Scribes and Pharisees of a latter day Jerusalem. The manuscript was then nameless, and it was Adams who found the title. He found it in a quotation which appears now on the program as follows:

They called me in the public squares  
The Fool that wears a crown of thorns.

It was by Tennyson, Adams added casually, and then, when pinned down, confessed that he could not say at what point in the poet's works it could be read. He himself had found the quotation, accredited to Tennyson, in the fourth chapter of Locke's "Simple Sentences." Basil King, who has written the preface to the published edition of "The Fool" which Harpers are bringing out, was also unable to trace the verses. So here is Pollock having named his piece from verses he cannot find and, as it is doubtless extremely embarrassing when people ask him where they occur, any reader who knows the answer can trust the oversigned to forward all clues to him.

In the fourth act of "The Fool" the Scoffer and the Man Who Tried to Live Like Christ come face to face. The scene is the Man's poor room under a mean roof, but there is an almost obtrusively large number of books and, indeed, in the ostentatious care with which the Man's periodical literature is confined to such magazines as the *Scientific American*, the *Review of Reviews*, the *Dial*, the *Atlantic* and the *World's Work*, his avoidance of all the lighter magazines becomes a trifle oppressive to an audience that is not above an occasional gross and sensual indulgence in a little fiction.

Well, the Man is serene and happy and there is a sort of Bob Cratchitty-Christmas air all around him. The Scoffer is foaming and rattling in the clutch of locomotor ataxia.

"Ho, ho!" says the wealthy Scoffer, looking around the shabby room, "you've made a nice failure of your life."

With which remark he hobbles through the door and out of the play. But his father pauses on the threshold long enough to turn and say: "I wonder, after all, which of you has made the real failure?" It is understood that if even the subnormal playgoer doesn't quite get what Mr. Pollock is driving at a diagram will be furnished by the usher. Our own guess would be that the play was too helpful even for the inferior grade of morons, but Brother Pollock is one who has studied audiences for many years in many lands and it is therefore the more disconcerting to find the play of his heart written in the patiently explanatory way one uses in telling a story to backward children.

INTRODUCING MIKE GOLDREYER.

EVERY one on Broadway is wearing a slightly broader grin this week because the play called "The Last Warning" seems to be one of those resounding successes which run for years. It was produced on Tuesday last by a firm named Mingold, and the gold of Mingold is Mike Goldreyer. Mike was born in Brooklyn about twenty-four years ago.

To the world at large that name is fraught with no associations. But to all the dramatic editors in town it is associated with a quiet, mild mannered little chap who for some years past has made the rounds of the newspaper offices carrying photographs of actresses for the Sunday editions. He used to fulfill this function for the House of Woods, when suddenly one afternoon away he went with a flush in his cheeks and his head in the air. A golden haired star had complained bitterly that all the Sunday pages had been given over to photographs of a lesser lady in the company, and one of the Woods potentates had not only upbraided Mike but voiced the suspicion that Mike was thus serving the lesser lady in the impious hope of illicit reward. At this unworthy insinuation Mike's fury was tremendous and as unexpected as that of the rabbit in the old story—the rabbit that came up out of the cellar muttering grimly: "Where in that bulldog?"

At all events Mike was soon peddling pictures for the office of William



PERCIVAL KNIGHT

Mr. Knight is playing the temporary butler in his own comedy, "Thin Ice," at the Comedy.

Harris, Jr. To David Wallace, then general manager of that establishment, he used to suggest from time to time that he would like to put on a play himself. It seemed so easy. He would like to have a chance at any play that came in, provided it called for only one set and had only seven characters. "But," protested Wallace, "suppose it's no good?" "I wouldn't know whether it was anyway," replied Mike sagely, "and neither would you." Well, such a play did come in. Mike mysteriously conjured up the money wherewith to produce it. It was called "The Short Cut" and opened out of town, playing two performances at Wilkes-Barre, where it yielded \$29 to the box office in the evening and 50 cents at the matinee. Shortly thereafter Mike was seen peddling pictures again, unruffled and unchanged—unchanged, that is, save in one particular. He had a different overcoat for each day of the week. There had been a winter scene in "The Short Cut."

REGRETS.

HERE follow two apologies. One is to George Hobart, the enormously prosperous playwright from whose operas such as "Buddies," "Sunny Boy," "The Blue Flame" (it was partly his) and the incredibly untunny O'Neill travesty in the current Greenwich Village Follies we have felt it our painful duty to sneer as publicly as possible. Then in the midst of the elegant ructions of the Music Box Revue he appeared as coauthor with Walter Catlett of an extremely amusing skit called "The Lady in Red." At this bit of fooling, as acted by Bobby Clark and Grace La Rue, we shook like jelly with our immoderate laughter. And then, dazed by the mass of bespangled and stunnerful scenery and dazzled by Irving Berlin's most ambitious score, we forgot, in the rush and rattle of the morning-after review, to give a cheer for Hobart.

The second apology is to John Cort, who has taken the Sixty-third Street Music Hall, rebuilt its stage, refurbished its auditorium and renamed it Daly's Theater. As this auditorium is somewhat similar in style and shape to a subway car and as it has all its atmosphere and reputation yet to earn, we were a little affronted at its bland appropriation of so sacrosanct a name. And then into the theater moved "On the Stairs," suggesting that Mr. Cort had not meant Augustin Daly at all. He only meant Arnold.

MY DEAR SIR:

From Mr. Helferts.

I was at the opening of the Second Music Box Revue and greatly enjoyed the new music of Mr. Irving Berlin. The originality of the rhythm in jazz numbers, particularly in the "Pack Up Your Sins and Go to the Devil" in the score of the "Satan's Palace," as well as the charming melodies of the songs "Montmartre" and the "Lady of the Evening" were pleasing and interesting. I wish to congratulate the pioneer in this new style of music, jazz and the author of the captivating melodies. JASCHA HEFERTS. New York, Oct. 24, 1922.

"None of Your Impudence."

To the Dramatic Editor: This will never do! Your critic, not content with remembering away on us all that has seemed finest and best of those great American actors of some thirty years ago who will some day form the solid basis upon which American stage history will be written, proceeds to trifle with the sacred facts of history. "The young student, the young Goethe, as he writes of 'Le Mort et Couvrit de l'Invisible Malheur'." It so happens that Goethe was never in Paris.

It so further happens, with your critic's usual luck, that Goethe was alive at the time he mentions. If this is to be a basis for dramatic criticism, however, I offer the following, which you may keep in your everet gallery and throw into his articles merrily from time to time: "Emperor William, sorely in need of a shave, attended the London opening of 'Sally'."

"Beaumont and Fletcher, with mouths merrily pursed, witnessed the rescue of Captain John Smith by Pocahontas."

"As the Hon. Mr. Fulton steamed along the river, William Wordsworth, with his legs crossed, could be seen in a deck chair."

"Alexander Mohr, badly cock eyed, was a member of the New York cast of 'A Little Bit of Fluff.'" H. J. M. New York, Oct. 26, 1922.

A Doctor at "The Fool."

To the Dramatic Editor: I have just derived peculiar pleasure from a reading of your critique on Channing Pollock's "The Fool." At my age the shells we like come unexpectedly, and while it may not add to the gaiety of the nations that are yours, I make bold to venture to express myself on this matter, hoping not to bore you as much as a stranger might. I saw "The Fool" and thought it big. Beyond this I had a sense of doubt, a jumble of doubts. Your review clears up the meaning of some of my sensations, for which I thank you. The theater has become so big in so many ways that to go to it is something of a task. To get seated there and become interested in the performance is something to be thankful for. "The Fool" certainly interests me, awakens slumbering thoughts of essential justice, and sets one wondering why human nature can't at least visualize for ourselves and so act on a medium of

The Talk of Broadway

By FRANK VREELAND

CHARLES E. COCHRAN has already begun tucking American plays in his bag for production overseas, doing his London Christmas shopping early in New York. Besides the first "Music Box Revue," which is free to roam the rest of the world, now that the metropolis has seen it, the British producer has brought down the English rights to "So This Is London!" and "Little Nellie Kelly." This is under his standing agreement with George M. Cohan to have first call on a chance to transmute all his pieces to a British key.

Incidentally, Cochran is to alter the scene in the Englishman's home so that Londoners can recognize it more quickly.

One of the interesting developments on the theatrical chessboard is the fact that Sam H. Harris is going to move a production to Boston soon and because of prior contracts edge out of a theater there a show produced by his former partner, George M. Cohan, although the Cohan show is sailing away most of the loose change in Boston's theatrical belt. The Harris piece is "Captain Applejack" which is muffed here on November 11 at the Cort. It takes out a Boston license at the Tremont Theater the following Monday, showing the way to the exit to "Little Nellie Kelly," which has been kept

ing the Cohan family from worrying about coal bills at the rate of \$22,000 a week. However, Cohan can drop Boston from his calling list temporarily with perfect equanimity, since his musical show is slated to turn in an alarm at the Liberty Theater here that same Monday. "Molly Darling," the present incumbent of the Liberty, may be shifted to another Broadway playhouse if Megley and Moore, its producers, can swing votes for it. Otherwise Jack Donahue's trained feet will start performing their miracles on the road.

"Captain Applejack" will be succeeded at the Cort by none other than our old friend "Merton of the Movies," which will be opened there on November 13 by George C. Tyler amid cheers from the adapters, George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly. It was thought at first that John Barrymore's "Hamlet" would start a cozy glow at the Cort. However, it now seems to be certain that Arthur Hopkins will throw the starting switch on this at the Sam H. Harris Theater. This house, by the way, was the first in which Barrymore essayed a serious role, that of the clerk in "Justice," back in the mad, mad days when it was known as the Candler.

"It's a Boy," now at the Harris, is expected to take wings on November 11, probably to Boston. If "Hamlet" opens on November 13, this and the other premieres on that date will make it a frantic evening for the incorrigible first nighter.

Robert Edmond Jones is said to be designing settings for "Hamlet," which are more in a modernistic vein than the scenic investiture for "Macbeth," which can still make many a face light up in recollection on Broadway. They are of the black and white type, and in some scenes they take to the silhouette style.

The theatrical map is likely to loosen up some more the week of November 20. "R. U. R." will be propelled up from the Garrick Theater to the Frazee. The wretched "The Republic for It," but fate overruled them. "Her Temporary Husband" will quit the Frazee and alight in some other town. The next Guild production to stop the gap at the Garrick will be either "The Lucky One" by A. A. Milne or Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," with the chances in favor of the Milne play. Probably with this piece and his other plays, including "The Forty-Fourth Day," Milne will have so many plays in circulation he will be able to stop writing mystery murder tales.

On November 22 Charles Dillingham's next musical show, "The Bunch and Judy," with Jerome Kern and Anne Caldwell as its immediate forebears, is scheduled to check in at the Globe Theater. Edward Royce is staging it, when not counting up at the box office of "Orange Blossoms." Joseph Cawthorn will be featured, and others prominent in the cast will be Fred and Adele Astaire, who thus climb back to the Dillingham pay roll; Mabel Gray, English actress; Gus Minton and Delano Dell, the young actor who was carried bodily from the Chicago company of "Molly Darling."

William A. Brady will undertake a departure in policy for him—of recent years, that is—when he presents shortly at the Playhouse "Up She Goes," which will be the first musical show ever allowed to check in at the Playhouse. The title is the choice of Frank Craven, who made the book over from the old fashioned model called "Too Many Cooks." Probably the name will be changed by the time Brady has smoked some more cigars.

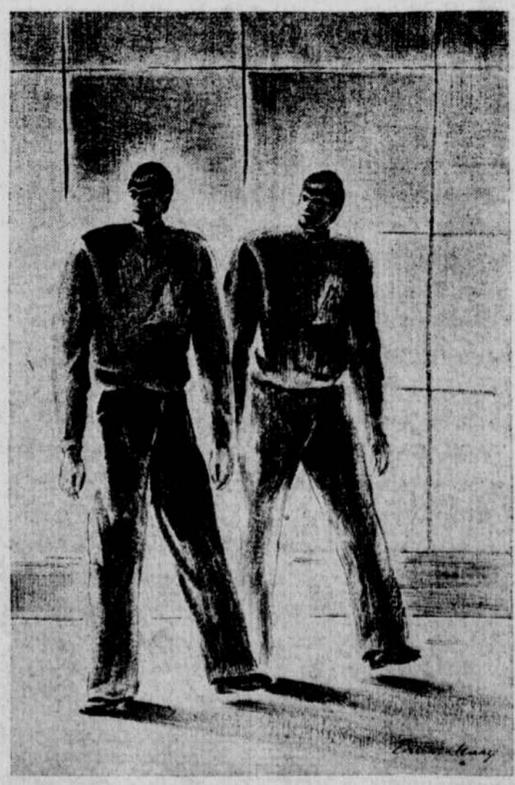
This show was to have opened last Monday in Providence, but went blithely on with rehearsals instead. "To the Ladies" was suddenly thrown to the multitude to fill the hole in Providence's culture. The latter play is reported to have gone only a few rungs up in Philadelphia recently.

Albee Brady, it appears, will be kept from contact with the spoken drama for some time. Her contract gives her exclusive services when needed to Famous Players-Lasky, and her vaudeville engagements are possible only while the director is looking where the next pleasant trip on location should be taken or the property department is making another hall room scene. Recently Miss Brady closed her vaudeville tour and was immediately shunted down to Florida to eye the camera.

The Moscow Art Theater is likely to come to the Forty-fourth Street after that house is out of bondage to the films. Mme. Cecil Sorel, another importation, will also, it seems quite certain now, appear in this city, aided by the good right hand of the Shuberts. Her theater and her date are still shrouded in mystery.

Leo Dirlichstein will probably step jauntily into this city in a couple of weeks in the new Ben Hecht play "Under False Pretense," which will probably be sailing under different colors by then. William Hodge is likewise open for bids about the same time in "For All of Us."

"The Wedding March," by Henri Batulle, is likely to be Marjorie Rambeau's next play after she has ceased to find anything interesting in "The Cold Fish." Henry Miller, with his son, Gilbert, was reported to be planning a production of this serious work, but Woods says he has the rights to the play, which, in the case of two such productions, would mean a battle over Batulle.



Two of the Robots, the mechanical creatures that hew the wood and carry the water in the imagined world of "R. U. R."