

THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

Predictions For Next Season

THE theatrical season of 1944-1945 will be getting under full way in a month or so. At the beginning of a number of past seasons I offered some predictions in various directions that honored me by turning out to be strangely accurate. Emboldened by their politeness in obliging me, I risk my standing as a clairvoyant in presenting a number concerned with the coming year. (They are, for the record, set down on June 5.)

1. If Eugene O'Neill sees fit to allow the production of his play, *The Iceman Cometh*, completed several years ago, it will win both the Pulitzer and Critics' Circle prizes hands down, even if the manner of its presentation should turn out to be not altogether satisfactory. It is one of the finest plays in the American dramatic record and, besides winning the afore-said awards, can't help being a big box-office success. It is certain that O'Neill will not permit the production of a second completed play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, under any circumstances.

2. Whatever they may think of the play critically, it is likely that the reviewers will cotton to the theme of Zoë Akins' next effort. Its droll originality will appeal to anyone fed up with

the endless rehashings of the same old plots and ideas.

3. Producers being what they are, there will probably be not one but at least four or five plays dealing with sailors on the loose among the female sex. The producers will be fetched by their "timeliness." Most of the plays will obviously lean toward the risqué; they will in essence generally suggest *Sailor, Beware!*; one or two of them may have moments of amusing observation and some pretty fair gags; but not one of them will be of any genuine quality, and not more than one of them will make any real money.

4. Most of the plays put on by the experimental groups will, as usual in recent years, disclose nothing in the way of authentic merit. If perchance one of the plays is even faintly above the average of those generally sponsored by the groups, it is sure to be praised by the surprised reviewers out of all proportion to its actual worth.

5. At least ten moving picture actresses will appear in Broadway plays and out of the lot not more than two or at most three will prove themselves satisfactory in the dramatic medium.

6. It will rain or snow on the occasion of most of the premières at the National Theatre. (It usually does.)

7. If the City Center Theatre sees fit to inaugurate a Christmas pantomime in the Drury Lane manner, it will prove to be eminently successful.

8. The usual number of Hollywood movie scenario writers will come into the theatre with plays. None of their attempts at serious drama will be worth a hoot, although one or maybe two will prove fair enough in a humorous direction. This will also apply to former playwrights who have sacrificed their talents to the pictures for any considerable period.

9. No dirty musical comedy book will get by.

10. No play dealing with Hollywood life or the radio business will succeed.

11. Any professional Shakespearean revival, if cast with some well-known actors, will be prosperous at the box-office, even if the play isn't particularly well done.

12. At least four plays dealing in one way or another with the world upheaval will see production. Although one or even so many as two may possibly do some business, none will disclose any real quality.

13. It will again be a big year for "entertainment," with serious drama occupying a distinctly minor position.

14. There will be at least half a dozen new plays by English playwrights, only one of which will have anything to recommend it critically.

15. There will also be several propaganda plays by Americans, not one of which, aside from its routine sincerity, will in turn have anything to

recommend it critically. Nevertheless, the newspaper reviews of one or two of them will be something pretty fancy.

16. Let a producer see fit to put on a revival of *Rip Van Winkle* with an appropriate actor as Rip and it will surely score a success.

17. Last season, there were seven dramatizations of novels, all but one of which were commercial failures. The average for this coming season will be better.

18. None of the following American playwrights, if they come into the theatre with new plays, will top their best previous work: Maxwell Anderson, William Saroyan, Elmer Rice, Vincent Lawrence, Clifford Odets, George Kelly.

19. If, in turn, they show up, watch for improvement in the cases of John Steinbeck, Robert Sherwood, Sidney Kingsley, Paul Osborn.

20. Any play dealing with a domineering mother or wife, pregnancy, the estate of the Negro, the danger of fascist tendencies within the nation, or the plight of the Jews will have a hard row to hoe and, unless it be at least five times better than plays on the same subjects which we have been getting in recent years, will fail with the reviewers and at the box-office.

21. The public will get tired of ballets incorporated into musical shows and by the end of the season, however good they may be, will cry quits.

22. Lillian Hellman's next play, though she will have a hard time controlling her tendencies, will doubtless

be more in the line of a study in character and will forego to a large degree her later fetish for political and sociological exercises.

23. No play which begins with a radio in operation, whatever the nature of the play, will succeed.

24. The motion picture interests will back at least half a dozen plays which, though some of them may turn out to be good investments, will none of them be of any sound critical quality.

25. Following the great success of *The Voice of the Turtle*, there will be several similar small-cast ventures, only one of which at most will capture the slightest public interest.

26. If Judith Anderson re-appears on the stage, she will achieve a personal success no matter what the play or the rôle in which she offers herself.

27. If *The Belle of New York*, which has been announced for revival, is actually revived, they will doubtless cast the wrong girl in the old Edna May rôle and throw a monkey-wrench into the show.

28. Fully two dozen actresses will provide newspaper interviews which will uniformly attest not only to the remarkable gifts of whatever director they happen to be currently working with, along with the fact that he personally is a darling, but to the play being one of the favorites of their entire careers. If any of the actresses is over fifty-five, there will be included a fulsome tribute to either Charles Frohman, David Belasco, or George Tyler.

29. Among all the musical shows

that see production, there will be not one which at some period during the evening will not bathe its stage in a purple light.

30. If the Lunts follow their announcement with a revival of Molnar's *The Guardsman*, it will be a commercial success. If, on the other hand, they should decide to revive George Kaufman's and Edna Ferber's *The Royal Family*, which they have not announced, it will be an even greater commercial success. In either case, they will also score a personal and critical success.

31. Should someone see fit to produce a farce dealing with horse racing, it will fail, even if it isn't so bad.

32. Following its failure to make an award to a play last season, the Pulitzer committee will without question arbitrarily make an award at the end of this next season, whether any play deserves it or not.

33. Playwrights with their eyes on the box-office will with negligible exception fall all over themselves explaining why any young leading male character in their plays not in uniform happens to be that way. Most of them, however, will play safe by sending the boys around to Brooks' for the protective costumes.

34. Billy Rose has announced six positive productions. He will doubtless go through with two at most.

35. The next dream play that sees production, whatever it is, will be a failure.

36. At least three exhibits which will be treated roughly by the review-

ers will succeed in spite of them, and at least one which they will praise will fail at the box-office.

37. The Theatre Guild's season will hardly match its last season in prosperity.

38. Three novice actresses and two novice actors will score big successes with the critics. Of them all, only one will amount to anything in subsequent seasons.

39. There will be at least two so-called psychological thrillers which will be compared with *Angel Street* to their discredit.

40. Of the various mystery plays that will see production the best that one will be able to say of the best of them is that it is only fair and considerably below the mark of certain

plays of the species exhibited in other years.

41. The projected musical version of Molnar's *Liliom* by the Rodgers-Hammerstein combination is certain of success.

42. Daphne du Maurier's dramatization of her novel, *Rebecca*, will hardly repeat its Chicago success in New York.

43. The revival of Oscar Straus' *The Waltz Dream*, if at all well done, will make money.

44. Of the new plays that may be tried out in the small summer theatres none will prove to be of any real quality.

45. It will be the last season that ice skating shows will retain their hold on the public.



" . . . Just to prove that it CAN be done in mid-stream. . . ."

PRODUCED 2003 BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRAGIC GREECE

By JAMES H. POWERS

IN a Europe where the afflictions borne by Germany's victims have become a cruel commonplace, the plight of Greece is in many respects unique. All the *dramatis personæ* of ancient classical drama, and not a few elements of melodrama, find place and rôle on the stage where her tragic story unfolds, act by act, toward a denouement still unpredictable.

That stage itself is more spacious than many imagine. From the homeland of a people reduced by starvation, beset by invaders, and torn by internal factionalism, it stretches over the blue waters of the Aegean to the Lebanese mountains of the Levant States — where delegates from discordant groups met recently in the latest attempt to achieve unity among tough guerrilla bands fighting in Greece and the régime in exile at Cairo. It spreads southward to the valley of the Nile and the Egyptian Sudan — where some 260 veteran Greek officers, most of them bearing decorations bestowed by the British Government for bravery at El Alemein and in sea battles of the Eastern Mediterranean, now huddle in a con-

centration camp under British bayonets. It widens to Washington and Pretoria — whither other heroic fighters against the Italian and German invaders have been dispatched to posts of idleness and neglect, remote from the Middle East where power politics, royal ambition, and the demands of the Greek people for responsible constitutional government are presently in collision. Finally it touches London — where dynastic alliance ties the fortunes of the House of Glucksburg to the British royal family through the marriage of the sister of the Greek king to the late Duke of Kent, and where considerations of imperial British policy in the post-war Mediterranean world marshal support of Winston Churchill's government behind the claims of George II of the Hellenes, whose people want no more of him.

The Greeks thus find themselves tangled simultaneously in three perplexing problems, any one of which would suffice in normal times to occupy the entire attention and energy of a nation. They are fighting the German invader and his Bulgarian

JAMES H. POWERS has been foreign editor of the *Boston Globe* for the last eighteen years. He is a graduate of Boston University, and is author of the book *Years of Tumult*.

PRODUCED 2003 BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED