

THE NEW YORKER

Rahman Bey, the Human Pincushion — A Chill Night at the Neighborhood Playhouse — The American Girl Glorified Once More — A French Film and a German — Our Error

SOMETHING new has come to the theatre in the person of Fakir Rahman Bey, an Egyptian, who demonstrates the principles of his curious science. His program consisted of such choice bits as Body Rigidity, Thought Reading, and Burial Alive. He also inserted daggers, needles and nails into portions of his person and permitted heavy stones to be broken on his stomach. We were fascinated, for these things actually did happen. Dr. Hereward Carrington, sometime associated with mediums, introduced the fakir in a speech which had a veneer of science. Rahman Bey, like other teachers, hopes to cure the world by an application of his fakirism. Whether or not the ability to run a needle through your neck without pain is going to make living endurable we cannot say, but from the aspect of a sideshow Rahman Bey is superb. One can work up a beautiful sadistic glow by ordaining, as a fractional part of the audience, that the fakir shall be buried alive for eleven minutes — every shovelful of sand cast on his coffin confers the weight of godlike powers. If Rahman Bey is the master of life and death, he very considerably shares that privilege with his audience. Our own theory is that Rahman Bey has very little to do with the wonders performed upon his person. To us he seemed a rather handsome, negative young man with neither the character nor the power to will when he should sleep or when he should wake. For the mysteries that happen, if mysteries

they are, we believe one of his alleged assistants is responsible. This inconspicuous man watched Rahman Bey with piercing gaze; he was always close at hand during the experiments; he it was who led the stumbling fakir from the stage and inserted daggers in his biceps. We could believe that he was hypnotizing the fakir as deliberately as the fakir himself soothed a rabbit into rigidity. But we were not one of those to investigate at close range on the stage, being content to accept it for what it was — the sort of thing that made Mr. Barnum famous. See the greatest show on earth. Rahman Bey! Gets buried alive. Sleeps on swords and juggles with Death. Right this way, ladies and gents. Right this way!

Nothing else entertained us quite so much. The Neighborhood Playhouse put on its annual "Grand Street Follies" and once again we walked a mile or so to find an elevated railroad that would take us there. We have a very soft spot in our critical heart for the Neighborhood Playhouse; we admire the genuine talent found there and we like the way it is displayed. But this time we feel that the organization has done us dirt. Our chief complaint lies in the fact that we had never seen a "Grand Street Follies". One year we were somewhere in Europe and the next we were gallivanting around the Equator, but even in these unlikely places rumors of the excellence of the productions reached us. Nothing, so the tales went, had ever been produced on

Broadway quite so amusing, and so we were all prepared to see something really exceptional. Either rumor lied as usual, or else this current production is not quite up to scratch, because we found much of it hard sledding indeed. Perhaps that is appropriate, since the North Pole is selected for most of the scenes. At any rate, Eskimos wailing their native songs amid the icebergs and Yankee promoters dropping in on them from passing airplanes left us chilled and discouraged before the first curtain. Albert Carroll was wasted as a clown, the ensemble lagged, and only Paula Trueman seemed to us completely lovely. This young woman has the most beautiful hands and feet we have ever seen; she moves them with consummate grace — a nice artistry that combines abandon with reserve. What she does is not important; just to sit and watch her, unthinking, is pleasure enough. One bit written by Milt Gross in his famous "Nize Baby" manner rocked the house to side splitting laughter, and there was an entertaining parody on "Uncle Tom's Cabin", done with a Russian décor that seemed to us oddly like the pictures of Miguel Covarrubias, but with these blood warming exceptions "The Grand Street Follies" proved but a frosty evening.

Florenz Ziegfeld, after his customary backing and filling, again glorified the American girl in a revue called "No Foolin'", which name was later changed to "Glorifying the American Girl" — perhaps a wise move since this label has become a trademark as widely recognized as Campbell's or Mennin's. Emphasis for this season is laid on purity. Mr. Ziegfeld evidently feels the present type of revue is brazen; and if the pot after scouring itself a bit wants to call attention to the color of the kettle, we for one are

content. The result is happy, and gives the audience an opportunity to admire pretty costumes rather than pretty bodies. After all there is a sameness about the latter, which were created more or less on identical lines, Darwin to the contrary, but there is an admirable variation to the art of the couturière. The jokes too are well covered, and it would take a mind steeped in suggestive thoughts to discover the dirt hidden there, if any. This revue maker has the gift of beauty not always shared by his contemporaries; Ziegfeld creates a picture of loveliness which others vainly seek to improve on by elaboration. "Dans la Boule Lumineuse" and "The Goddess of Feathers" remain in our memory as particularly gorgeous spectacles, and we think that Greta Nissen dancing in "Mlle. Bluebeard" gives the best pantomime of the year. It's a good show, clean, cool, and colorful.

This month, openings in the spoken drama being few, we turned to the movies for an evening or so of entertainment. The first to draw us was the American opening of "Les Misérables", which was offered at Carnegie Hall to a specially invited audience presumably chosen for its sympathetic interest in Victor Hugo's work, or the French nation, or perhaps the Universal Pictures Corporation. When we entered the hall we felt as if this were an occasion such as the welcoming of Joffre or celebrating the victory on the Marne. French and American flags floated from every box and balcony — actually they hung limp in the frightful heat, but the effect was martial. The orchestra played the "Marseillaise" at great length, and one was always standing up for a national anthem. So much for the setting. Our impression of the picture itself was that it was inadequate, that the motion

picture camera in spite of its great strides is as yet unable to film at its full value a work like "Les Misérables", which is after all primarily a great philosophical treatise rather than a novel. But we are unable accurately to judge. From where we sat in a box far on the side the screen was so distorted as to give the impression of people sliding or climbing precariously over decks in a rough sea, and the faces of the actors had an irritating habit of elongating and narrowing in a manner that quite outdid all the frightful masks that Lon Chaney ever adopted. This or the heat made us somewhat seasick, so we sat with closed eyes during part of the showing, and therefore may have missed something very fine. It must be recorded that the audience showed its appreciation by tumultuous applause, but that may have been the Gallic temperament; we heard more French spoken around us than we have ever heard on the rue de Rivoli.

The following night we went to see "Variety", the praise of which has become so persistent that we could not very well ignore it. We were repaid for our trouble. This film, made by UFA, the great German organization, stirred us as nothing has since "The Big Parade". Actually it seemed to us a finer picture because Ewald André Dupont, the director, did not have the massed effects to work with that King Vidor utilized so well, and it is an axiom that emotion can be obtained from any moving body—soldiers on the march to charging cattle. There is genius in the story of this ballyhoo man of a Hamburg sideshow, his struggle to escape from that sordid life with his mistress, and the tragic end they make of it together. If this piece is a box office success, as it seems to be at its first showing in New York, then it overturns all the notions of movie

THE DRAMA SHELF

"In a Garden" by Philip Barry (Doran). *The beautifully phrased play of a wife who grew tragically weary of cleverness.*

"The Lamplighter" by Charles Dickens (Appleton). *A picturesque little volume containing a one act farce, and the short story from which its creator evolved it.*

"The House in the Wood" by Alice W. Alden (Old Tower Press, Chicago). *Adventures of children among fairies, pirates, and royal folk. Suitable for outdoor presentation.*

"Every One Has His Fault" by Mrs. Inchbald (Oxford). *Another in the series of delightful little reprints of English comedies of the eighteenth century.*

"Theatre Practice" by Stark Young (Scribner). *Interesting comment on such phases of the theatre as acting, directing, illusion, costumes. Illustrated by photographs.*

magnates as to what the public wants. The powers that be had better consider again the scripts they are wont to welcome with joy. There is absolutely no sentimentality in "Variety", and no palliative is offered for the starkness of the story. The girl is frankly a bad woman; she runs with men other than her accredited lover because she wants to—nobody betrays her. The deserted wife is mercifully not shown bending over the cradle of her abandoned child, although there is one, and the man has no super qualities. He is simply a dazed, blundering human caught in the grip of a great passion. All the actors are admirable, with Emil Jannings and Lya de Putti particularly fine, but it is to the photography that the laurels should go. Everything is utilized, and we learn that feet may be more expressive than faces and that a man's back may

show more despair than all the tear filled eyes that ever streamed across the silver screen. Really a great picture.

In a recent issue of THE BOOKMAN we committed a deplorable error. We compared Walter Hampden's playing of Manson in "The Servant in the House" to that of Forbes-Robertson in the same part. Now the error lies in the fact that Sir Johnston never played the part of Manson, which was written specially for Mr. Hampden

by Charles Rann Kennedy. Naturally under the circumstances Mr. Hampden might reasonably feel aggrieved. We offer him our sincere apologies for the mistake, which probably upsets us far more than it does him, since we were the one to blunder. What happened of course was that we confused "The Servant in the House" with "The Passing of the Third Floor Back", since the leading parts of the two are somewhat similar.

LARRY BARRETTO

INTERIM

By Babette Deutsch

SUMMER again, and summer again going, —
 Old twisted leaves underfoot, a rainy haired cloud
 Above the tall corn, and a damp wind blowing
 Through the rich green where the first rust is showing
 On trees no longer proud.

How many summers since we sat together,
 Watching the drift of cloud and leaf, and spoke,
 In voices veiled like the veiled wistful weather,
 Of the pull at the heart, when ungiven love is the tether . . .
 And then the tether broke.

So now we sit together and are not shaken
 By the dark pulse, or the dark dividing fear.
 We have given, and forgiven, as we have assaulted and taken
 The utmost claustral places. Now what touch can awaken
 Leafage trodden under, year on year?

Autumn not yet come, and summer quietly going, —
 This present bleakness speaks of an hour when the bright
 Blood shall torture us with its frozen flowing;
 Yet now love is a coal that grief is sullenly blowing:
 We shall have our fire for the night.