

THE NEW YORKER

Sophocles's "Electra" — "Mr. Pim Passes By" Again — Lo, the Poor Negro! — Miss Brady's Latest Venture — Tripe from the Central Powers — A New Film — Shows for Spring and Summer

EACH year a pleasant clamor breaks out on the skill, value, and vitality of this playwright and that; their wares are examined and the virtues of them extolled. The drama, it seems, has always just produced a prodigy whose works are so nearly a permanent contribution that if they do not take their places beside the immortals they will at least be sure of many revivals. We do indeed have revivals, but those successes of ten, thirty, or fifty years ago are discovered to be so based on the passing manners, the waistcoats and stays of their period, as it were, that when presented today they are hardly intelligible as a gauge of human emotions and passions. The playwright who thought he was writing truly of elementals was concerned only with the trappings which concealed them. Doubtless he too was hailed as immortal on his opening nights. The theatre does not progress through the ages. We can think of no other art which has gained so much in technical facility and so little in true expressionism. Productions have been enormously aided by lighting, color, and scene, but the playwright has not grown in stature with his mechanical devices. Indeed he has frequently regressed in that he has forgotten to study those extant models of an earlier and greater art.

The test for this is simple. Take your favorite play of the winter, whatever it may be, and strive to consider it in an age where bootleggers and

night clubs are nonexistent, where possibly "divorce" has become merely a word for the delving of savants, where all reference to short dresses, bobbed heads, cigarettes, and rolled stockings is meaningless since those things no longer exist in just those forms — consider it thus and see what happens to your favorite play. It has become as incomprehensible as an attempt to portray the Eleusinian Rites in the Martin Beck Theatre. No, there is nothing new in the drama and much that is old has been forgotten.

We were acutely conscious of this recently after seeing "Electra" given in the Metropolitan Opera House. Sophocles was born in 495 B. C. and he may have written "Electra" in middle age, which places it when the cultural world was young. Yet in spite of its antiquity the drama is as absorbing as on the day it was written. An audience which filled the Metropolitan to the doors testified by intense silence and vociferous applause to its eternal qualities. At that the play has little to depend on but the brilliant acting of Margaret Anglin who as Electra was plotting the murder of her guilty mother. The rest of the cast were so occupied in chanting their lines in the proper cadences that they forgot that a show of emotion, the qualities of pity or derision in swelling tones, was probably not unknown in ancient Greece. For all Miss Anglin's splendid interpretation Sophocles still remains the star. The epic significance of his theme of

vengeance may be adapted by all, but the manner of its upbuilding, the skilful rising from one inconsiderable climax to another until the final moment is reached, is his alone. There is one moment which we believe was interpolated — when Ægisthus orders his stepdaughter Electra to call her mother Clytemnestra in order that she may gloat with him over the corpse of Orestes. Electra slinks up the palace steps, never taking her eyes from him until suddenly she stoops beside the body on its bier and squalls into deaf ears, “Clytemnestra!” whereupon Ægisthus discovers that it is his wife who has been murdered. But this neither makes nor mars the play, dramatic as it may be; it is simply another well proportioned incident in a perfect sequence.

There was not of course any other opening which could bear comparison with “Electra” either as drama or as an interesting example from the historic past. We were treated to a number of revivals — slightly more recent to be sure — but these only confirmed our foreboding that plays now are intended to live only for a three months’ run. With “Mr. Pim Passes By”, however, the Theatre Guild offered at least one play which seems to have stood the test of years rather well. It was at any rate not too obviously dated, which may reflect not so much credit on A. A. Milne’s skill as on his sagacity in selecting for his locale rural England, which, as a dozen English authors are constantly pointing out, never changes. We do not visit in England, but it may be that life in a country house has not changed much since Trollope. So we are willing to believe that Mr. Pim could drop in on the Marden family for a few minutes and in that space, by his idle words, so confuse them that the lady does not

know whether she has one husband or two, and the man she is living with is unable to decide between divorce and connivance. For comedy purposes such bewilderment is permissible; and the cast read Mr. Milne’s gentle satire with relish. We particularly liked Dudley Digges as George Marden, and Gavin Muir played a healthy, rather vacant minded English boy to perfection.

This, by the way, is the Theatre Guild’s last production at the Garrick. In 1919, before they had grown powerful enough to build their own handsome theatre, they took it over, and have held it ever since. But with the passing of the Theatre Guild from the Garrick the Garrick passes too, since a skyscraper is destined to replace it. Built by Harrigan of Harrigan and Hart in 1890, it is old indeed as theatres or in fact any buildings go in New York. Such successes have been housed there as “Captain Jinks”, “Zaza”, and “The Little Minister”. Richard Mansfield played there, Maude Adams, Ethel Barrymore — almost all the great names of the last three decades. It is sad perhaps to have the shabby little theatre go; it will remain in legend only, with the Park Theatre and Tony Pastor’s, for New York is not a city of landmarks.

Another revival which was not so successful as “Mr. Pim” was “Goat Alley”, played by an all Negro cast. “Goat Alley” sets out to prove that all colored men are thieves and seducers with a propensity for falling into the hands of the police, and that all colored women are worthy, hard working, and too busy supporting the illegitimate children which have been wished on them to have time for any real wickedness. At least so it seemed to us. Every time Lucy Belle Dorsey’s husband went to jail or got a job in an-

THE DRAMA SHELF

The deluge of printed plays has these last weeks been so great that we can do no more than list them here under their several classifications.

SEEN OR TO BE SEEN ON
BROADWAY

"*The Road to Rome*" by Robert Emmet Sherwood (Scribner).

"*Chicago*" by Maurine Watkins (Knopf).

"*White Wings*" by Philip Barry (Boni, Liveright).

"*The Constant Wife*" by W. Somerset Maugham (Doran).

"*Pinwheel*" by Francis Edwards Faragoh (Day).

"*The Silver Cord*" by Sidney Howard (Scribner).

"*The Field God and In Abraham's Bosom*" by Paul Green (McBride).

"*Marco Millions*" by Eugene O'Neill (Boni, Liveright).

OTHER FULL LENGTH PLAYS

"*Saints in Sussex: Poems and Plays*" by Sheila Kaye-Smith (Dutton).

"*Out of the Sea*" by Don Marquis (Doubleday, Page).

"*Wat Tyler and Other Plays*" by Halcott Glover (Viking).

"*The Class War in Heaven*" by Luke (Badger).

NEW EDITIONS

"*The Ring and the Book*" by Robert Browning (Crowell).

"*The Would-be Gentleman*" by Molière, adapted by F. Anstey (Doran).

PAPER EDITIONS

"*Courting*" by A. Kenward Matthews (French).

"*Quincy Adams Sawyer*" by Fred-eric Justin Adams (French).

"*Pomero's Past*" by Clare Kummer (French).

"*Easy Come, Easy Go*" by Owen Davis (French).

"*The Rosary*" by Edward E. Rose (French).

ONE ACT PLAYS

"*More One-Act Plays by Modern Authors*" by Helen Louise Cohen (Harcourt, Brace).

"*The Merry Merry Cuckoo and Other Welsh Plays*" by Jeannette Marks (Appleton).

"*Two Crooks and a Lady*" by Eugene Pillot (French).

"*The Wandering Child*" by Mary Richmond Davidson (French).

"*The Flying Prince*" by Peggy Wood and Eugene Wood (Appleton).

"*Sparkling Lucia*" by Irene Jean Crandall (French).

"*The Purple Dream*" by Donald L. Breed (French).

"*The Love Cure*" by Mollie Moore Godbold (French).

"*Drums of Oude*" by Austin Strong (French).

"*Wedding Presents*" by John W. Rogers, Jr. (French).

"*The Cajun*" by Ada Jack Carver (French).

"*Mimi Lights the Candle*" by Edith Isham Coultter (French).

"*El Cristo*" by Margaret Larkin (French).

FOR CHILDREN

"*Lad and Other Story-Plays*" by Bertha Palmer Lane (Womans Press).

"*Dickon Goes to the Fair and Other Plays*" with an introduction by Mrs. A. Starr Best (Doran).

THE MOVIES

"*Let's Go to the Movies*" by Iris Barry (Payson, Clarke).

"*The Motion-Picture Cameraman*" by E. G. Lutz (Scribner).

other state the poor girl was sinned against, and when her husband came home there was yet another baby in the well worn cradle. After the third it

might be supposed that he would know what to expect; but no, his astonishment and rage finally broke the bonds of restraint and he strangled Lucy

Belle to death quite as Lulu Belle was strangled in another and more luxurious room. The author is eager to make it clear that all this is not Lucy's fault, even when she throws the last baby into a convenient millrace off-stage. She was born to work and work she did in a laundry all day, eking out that pittance by taking boarders, always young, amorous, and male. Under the circumstances it was a temptation for the boarders, but Lucy Belle might well have lessened it if she had invested some of her laundry money in a stout lock and key. With the exception of Evelyn Ellis who played the distressed heroine with some conviction, the others of the cast did not stand out. There was the inevitable crooning of spirituals whenever the drama paused for breath, but silence would have been more acceptable. It is a fallacy that the Negro race is composed entirely of Paul Robesons and Roland Hayeses. There are others, and less gifted.

This appears to be a month of revivals, for Henri Bernstein's play "The Thief" was again presented, with Alice Brady and Lionel Atwill in the leading rôles. It made, you will remember, a considerable success on its first presentation, theatregoers being shocked at a wife who would steal money to buy clothes in order to look well for her husband. But while the offense may be no less heinous now, still the dramatics of it are less than when it was first presented. We were unable to raise even one shudder of horror when Richard Voysin faced his wife in the bedroom and wrung from her the horrid truth that she had stolen so many thousand francs from his best friend. The explicit stories of family relations in even our best newspapers seem to have blunted us for all but the spiciest. Instead of taking it casually

Richard made a frightful fuss, and finally put his Marie Louise in such a position that she had to confess in order to save the son of the house, who had taken the blame for her sake, from death or worse. At least we suppose it was for worse, since the youth was to be exiled to some Godforsaken French possession. Miss Brady did marvelously well as the dress loving wife, Lionel Atwill was also excellent, and on the whole the revival should be considered a success. But for some reason the sharp tang of it has departed.

Free tickets are always a lure even for the wary critic, and so we were enticed into seeing two very terrible plays — the first called "One Glorious Hour", from the German, and the second, called "The Comic", written by Lajos Luria, a Hungarian. Neither reflected the least credit on these nations. In fact they convinced us that perhaps the war might not have been fought in vain. It is pleasant to think that one has fired a shot at these playwrights or their proxies, even though they did survive. "One Glorious Hour" is all about a painter, a poet, and a musician who flee to some sylvan spot where their arts can find the highest expression away from the blighting influence of women. But the arts don't seem to do very well until a beautiful girl appears, led by a sulky dog. She has been wrecked on the shore of their camp, and soon thereafter she wrecks their desire for solitude. They all fall in love with her and at her behest produce masterpieces. We did not see her portrait, which was turned from the audience, but the poem and the music which she inspired were pretty horrific. She drove them to utter such sonorous, grandiloquent words as we have never before heard on the stage. But she refused to love — either one or all.

Along about this time the young man in front of us explained that she was the Queen of Roumania. Since her name was Maria this sounded reasonable, although we thought it a thin disguise. So the mystery having been pierced, we left without the least reluctance. Later we learned that she was not the queen but a mere baroness. Nevertheless we are glad we didn't stay.

"The Comic" did not provide so many pleasing moments. It was all about an actor who tried to trap his wife into admitting she had a lover; meanwhile the wife was trying to convince her husband either that she did or didn't. It was not very clear. After floods of trivial talk which led nowhere the playwright lover and the suspicious husband got together and decided to use the situation in their new play. And if they did it is our guess that that play wasn't any more of a success in Budapest than this one was in New York.

We go to motion pictures approximately twice a year, and then only for cause. But the opening of "The King of Kings" was a temptation we could not resist; we were curious to see what Cecil de Mille would do with the story of Christ on the screen. We found on examination that he had done something truly extraordinary. Here is the last three years of Christ's life portrayed with reverence, considerable fidelity, and a great eye for beauty. Mr. de Mille has chosen, and with discretion, to copy his scenes in general from Renaissance pictures of the same subjects, and since most of them are familiar ones we are not startled by anything unusual. The Last Supper, the scene in the Temple, the Crucifixion, are those with which most of us have grown up from childhood. Pity, tenderness, and emotion are skilfully blended, and H. B. Warner as the

Christ plays his rôle with as much sympathetic understanding as is possible for mortal man. Only one moment was in bad taste and only one or two features depressed us. Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a courtesan of wealth who rides about in a chariot drawn by zebras, of all animals, and whose banquets look strangely like the de Mille orgies of earlier pictures. Beautiful as it is, we disliked the Easter card effect of the Garden of the Resurrection banked with lilies like a wedding at St. Thomas's Church, and we wondered somewhat at the beauty of all the women in the cast irrespective of rank or occupation. Were there no homely women in Palestine? But aside from these queries, "The King of Kings" is a magnificent picture which should be seen by all those who have doubts as to the power of the screen.

Two excellent musical shows came to town, both sponsored by the Messrs. Shubert. Of these the first, "The Circus Princess", offers more novelty than "A Night in Spain", which is built along strictly conventional revue lines; but its novelty is somewhat marred by a lack of acting and dancing talent which is overwhelming in the latter. "The Circus Princess" is all about a discredited Russian prince who is obliged to enter the circus as a masked marvel in order to gain a living. Since his marvel was performed offstage we cannot pass judgment on it, but we do not blame the Shuberts too much for that. This particular trick was leaping through space on horseback while playing a violin, or something of the sort, and while the producers have tried about everything else they may be pardoned for avoiding this stunt. Guy Robertson, the prince, might object. But he sang well, danced acceptably, and wore the very tight clothes of a Russian Hussar

with grace. The circus provided by Poodles Hanneford and his family performed everywhere from officers' clubs to royal palaces, gorgeous show girls looking not in the least Russian circulated around, and a good time was had by all, this critic especially.

"A Night in Spain" is at once more colorful, which it might be considering the locale, and shines with an array of stars including Phil Baker, Brennan and Rogers, our famous Norma Terris who does some good impersonations, and a very strange looking dancer named Helba Huara who is making her début in America. She is a distinct novelty here, although we have seen her like in the music halls of Paris. A

young man whose name we suspect is Tito Coral, although we could not identify it on the program, looks enough like the late lamented Valentino to be his brother. He, we imagine, has only stopped off on his way to Hollywood. There is some pretty music, and in particular a song called "With Love and Kisses" which will soon be mutilated by the street organs. Finally, neither of the programs for these shows states in bold type that they are Under the Personal Direction of Mr. J. J. Shubert, but in spite of that we consider them quite as good as any Shubert revues which have received this attention in the past.

LARRY BARRETTO

THE LONE CORNER OF YESTERDAY

By Charles Norman

REMEMBER me who overlooked the world
To reach the meadow of enchanted clovers,
Fourleafed, lucky clovers of idleness
Whose roots are heavy with unfertile hours.

Remember me who looked on loneliness,—
A train of freight cars pulling out at night —
And all the pretty symbols of distress
That poets write about and you have read.

But do not fail to learn that I still stand
By the lone corner of yesterday
Thinking, I will arrive in that Perhaps-land
Tomorrow, whose gates far down the street are glittering;

And standing there, my thoughts like moving pictures flash
Upon the frantic screen within my brain,
While my eyes stare at the high
Windowless houses of forgetfulness.