

## THE NEW YORKER

*Jeanne Eagels Returns — A Mystery of the Varieties — Explaining an  
Ancient Tragedy — War and Wall Street — Offerings Good and Not  
So Good — Passing of the Neighborhood Playhouse*

THERE was a perceptible brightening of the theatrical season during the month, when a number of plays which were distinct hits were rushed on to combat the Lenten slump. They followed no particular trend — comedies, mysteries, and melodramas appearing almost simultaneously — but each was good of its kind, and the results for theatregoers who had recently suffered under what appeared to be the ministrations of a dozen barnstorming companies were happy. The most eagerly awaited of these plays was "Her Cardboard Lover" in which Jeanne Eagels, long exiled to the provinces for her good work as Sadie Thompson, was again presented to her New York public. "Her Cardboard Lover" is that comedy in translation by Jacques Deval which has been announced during the past months as the starring vehicle for this actress and that, until one could believe the feminine rôle another Juliet, so eager were the ladies to appear in it. Miss Eagels proved the victor in this contest and presently "Her Cardboard Lover" was presented to New York, which took it to its bosom. There was plenty of applause, but strangely enough a major part of it went to Leslie Howard, late of "The Green Hat", who was not even featured. Now aside from Mr. Howard's very perfect acting, there seems to be a reason for this. The play was, we imagine, written to be dominated by a male star, and so well did the author

contrive it that even the considerable spotlights focused constantly on Miss Eagels failed to shade the other part. "Her Cardboard Lover" is fascinating French froth, if we may be permitted the alliteration. It offers the not very credible theme of a young woman who, divorced from her husband but still loving him madly, hires a youth who shall be lover in name only and thus save her from herself, or rather from the man she has left. This impecunious youth is instructed never to leave her side when danger threatens; he is ordered to stay on the job even when dismissed, and he does it. The humor of the piece centres entirely about the struggles of Simone to rid herself of young André who takes his contract seriously. It is very funny: she orders him out of the front door and he reappears from the bathroom; by means of the telephone he wrecks her plans to visit her ex-husband; he even feigns suicide in order to prevent a remarriage. So persistent is he that in the end he is rewarded when Simone discovers the hired lover is not all cardboard after all. As the last curtain falls she is explicitly telling him so.

Now all good Americans believe that Frenchwomen act this way, but it seems a matter for reasonable doubt whether even one ever did, so Miss Eagels should not be blamed if she fumbled the interpretation a little. She was, we thought, to say the unkind thing first, a bit too noisy, a little too dependent on the "Ooh, la la" school

of acting which supports itself by hysterical little shrieks and rolling eyes, but all this was only occasional. For the most part she carried her comedy lines with a sure knowledge of just how fragile and brittle they were, proving her worth as an actress by employing exactly the right intonation to give them value. Any performance heavier than air would have made them flop, and that Miss Eagels avoided. It is a long step from "Rain" to this play, but Miss Eagels takes it gracefully enough. "Her Cardboard Lover" should really be seen by all those who laugh at flippant wit. There is plenty of it in this piece.

The most successful attempt to incorporate the audience as part of the play that we have ever seen occurs in "The Spider". Here the action takes place on a vaudeville stage where the soft shoe dancers, the skating act, and the master magician are interrupted in their turns by a murder which takes place either behind the footlights or in the body of the house. Drastic measures are required in order to prevent the villain's escape, and so the entire audience is placed under technical arrest. Police are posted in the aisles, and an inspector harangues the suspects from the stage. Actors placed throughout the theatre add to the thrills as they rise to aid or impede justice. We did not know whether we were sitting beside the murderer or his next victim, and once when a revolver shot seemed to singe our hair we thought that we were going to be a victim ourselves. Suspicion is cast here, there, and everywhere, with Chatrand the great magician trying to unravel it with the help of several ghostly experiments and Alexander, "the boy with the radio eyes". We think the authors meant "radium" eyes, but no matter. Between them they managed

to solve the mystery, and about eleven o'clock the audience, highly reluctant to depart, was permitted to go its way in peace. This sensational and entertaining hokum was written by two such unlikely people as Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano, and the lead is taken by John Halliday. He is as good a magician as we have ever seen, and if the legitimate stage ever turns unprofitable he can go into vaudeville, making goldfish bowls appear and breaking out gardens of paper flowers with the best of them.

Quite of another pattern was "The Crown Prince", an earnest attempt to explain the death of the young heir to the Austrian throne who was found shot with his mistress in the hunting lodge at Meyerling some thirty five or so years ago. Certain hardly necessary changes were made in names, such as calling the Baroness Marie Vetsera, Anna; and changing the name of the hunting lodge to Kleyerdorf, but the story of that tragedy remains the same so far as we know it, except that poison is substituted for the gun which killed the pair. The first act is the best, in which is shown the intrigue surrounding a man of royal birth, the espionage to which he is submitted, and the pompous formality of the most rigid court in Europe. But the end, in which the crown prince and his lady find their love again in death, has a poignant beauty heightened by the splendid acting of Mary Ellis which is all too rare on our stage. Basil Sydney as the crown prince was sympathetic and Henry Stephenson was very fine as the emperor. The settings, reproducing faithfully that distant year 1889, were handsome and substantial. A sentimental evening.

There was a time when sentiment was the only basis on which a play could be

built. The then patrons of the theatre demanded it, and that they got their money's worth is evident to anyone who has time to read old scripts or who goes to the less gushing of the revivals. But our sharpened taste now demands a deal of irony as well, although, human nature being what it is, we still prefer our lovers clasped in each other's arms at the final curtain. Jed Harris, that shrewdest and youngest of the producers, knew what he was about when he offered "Spread Eagle". No more bitter lines, no sharper thrusts at vulnerable parts have been seen hereabouts since "What Price Glory" introduced a mode and held us gasping in our seats. "Spread Eagle" undertakes to expose who make wars, and why. It is as unflinching in its quest as the most pacific spectator could desire, and far more unflinching in its findings than a Congressional investigation. The trail leads inevitably to Wall Street, more specifically 120 Broadway, which may be termed the home of Big Business. Here the play opens with Martin Henderson, a financial magnate, and Joe Cobb, his secretarial rubber stamp, planning how they can induce intervention in Mexico in order to save the former's vast interests there. A visit to Washington has been fruitless — Coolidge being cool, even chill to the proposals. It is therefore up to Henderson to save his own hide — or oil or mines as the case may be. Quite coldbloodedly he plots with a Mexican bandit, who has arrogated to himself the title of general, for a rebellion, to cost so much in dollars and cents, which will forward the intervention. General de Castro does not know this, however. He has every intention of serving his own ends, but so has Henderson. Fate plays into the magnate's hands, for at this moment his daughter introduces a young man, the son of a

former President, who wants a job. Cobb sees the light first, but Henderson is not far behind. The young man gets his job. It's a good job with nothing to do and paying five thousand a year, but it is directly in the path of Castro's marauding band. They count on the youth's being killed; they know that these United States, presumably inflamed by an inspired press, will spring to arms to avenge "the White House baby". And it happens just as planned, almost. At any rate Henderson gets his war, and his billion dollar property is about to be made safe from everything but the income tax; but whether he finds the bargain to his liking is the question. For the boy he believed dead turns up to denounce him, is prevented only by the strong arm methods of his secretary, and the magnate is left with a son-in-law who knows him for a potential as well as active murderer — men are dying as the play ends. Not even the secretary who is his brains is left him, for that calculating young man, lured again by the sound of a band, enlists in the war which he helped create and quits his employer with an injunction as terse as it is salty. It is a crisp, bitter, racy evening with no one escaping the playwrights' shafts from Judge Gary to the Hearst newspapers. Ten years ago, and possibly ten years hence, this play would be suppressed on a moment's notice, but just now we happen to be at peace. The large cast is so remarkably competent and frequently so brilliant in its renditions that we prefer not to single out a few names for praise deserved by all.

Many of those who remembered with pleasure "A Bill of Divorcement" and "Will Shakespeare" were deeply disappointed in Clemence Dane's new play "Mariners", in which Pauline Lord starred. This piece, which set

out to expose the miseries that follow marriage between an ill suited couple such as a minister and a barmaid, began limpingly and became increasingly lame until the final curtain. Its structural weaknesses were many and surprising for a playwright with Miss Dane's gifts, but after all it is not important to point them out since the play ran only a couple of weeks. It is, however, important as proving that even a splendid cast cannot save a poor play. Blame is frequently passed on to the actors for fiascos which lie primarily with ill written lines. In this particular instance Pauline Lord, Arthur Wontner, Haidee Wright, and Mary Kennedy all labored bravely to give the play distinction, but it needed more than their gifts to save it. We felt particularly sorry for Pauline Lord, who has not had a good part since she wrung tears nightly from infatuated audiences in "They Knew What They Wanted". Eugene O'Neill or Sidney Howard should take her case under consideration.

Two plays dealing with the problems of the yellow and brown races were presented with "Menace" and "Savages Under the Skin". The first was laid in an island off Japan and the second in the Borneo Seas. Neither was so very good or so very bad. Once again white men escaping civilization or with an urge to create it dash around dealing out justice to loyal and disloyal natives, going mammy-palava, and being redeemed by the love of a pure American girl. It is very sad; there must be hundreds of good stories to be picked up in these strange climes, but our playwrights don't seem to find them. They harp on the same old string until it is frayed — we wish they would stay at home.

A dreary piece called "The Mystery Ship" was offered and has managed to

survive to date, proving perhaps that a title has a good deal to do with it. Crime and mystery aboard an ocean liner are more alluring than in a New York apartment, and so "The Mystery Ship" sets sail with a favoring breeze; but thereafter it runs into a dead calm which holds it stagnant until the end. All the old bugaboo devices are employed to raise the hair, but in this spectator's case they were unsuccessful. Doors slam, writhing hands appear through portholes, and the like, but unless the actors can contribute a little reality to these occurrences they are apt to appear implausible. This cast did not do much more than mumble the lines in an embarrassed fashion, for which they are hardly to be blamed. The identity of the murderer is quite skilfully concealed, but at that it took two playwrights to do it.

"Lucky" is one of those opulent and gorgeously mounted musical shows, without much humor to commend it. But if one likes spectacles, it provides a pleasing evening. We do. And so we were happy watching the beauties of a village in Ceylon, both architectural and feminine. It would seem that with their last production the Messrs. Dillingham, Ziegfeld, and Shubert had produced the final word in this sort of thing, but always they have one more trick up their capacious sleeves. This piece was enlivened by pretty Mary Eaton, our old friends Sawyer and Santley, and, last on the bill, Paul Whiteman, who with his talented orchestra offered the best brand of jazz. We would willingly have had more of the last. On the whole you can't go far wrong with "Lucky".

The Neighborhood Playhouse offered its yearly bill of lyric drama which, the organization implies, is as much for the education of its actors as

for the edification of its audiences. Certainly the agile and complicated dance forms which the cast perform have the effect of making them poised and graceful, but usually they provide too long an evening of æstheticism. Not so this time. The bill is so cleverly varied that never once is the note of monotony struck. The best and most vigorous of the pieces was "Ritornell", a dance suite performed by Hungarian gipsies, and staged with a rare sense of color and design. It alone was worth the trip to Grand Street.

But we shall no longer be making that trip to Grand Street. To the very great regret of everybody who admires the work of this group, the Neighborhood Playhouse is to close at the end of its spring season. A statement from the Misses Lewisohn who have been its angels announces that they can no longer afford to meet the heavy deficit — a deficit which has amounted to about half a million since the Playhouse was organized. Theatres and theatre groups come and go, but this one has made such an impress on New York with its artistic integrity that its passing will be sorely felt. It is just possible that if outside backing can be found the Neighborhood Playhouse will continue in a more feasible location with a larger theatre, and we hope this may be realized.

LARRY BARRETTO

#### THE DRAMA SHELF

"The Marble God, and Other One-Act Plays" — "The Tender Passion" by Hubert Griffith — "The Old Adam" by Cicely Hamilton — "The Barber and the Cow" by D. T. Davies (Brentano). Plays long and short in the British Drama League Library of Modern British Drama.

"The Bad Man" by Porter Emerson Browne — "White Collars" by Edith Ellis — "The Tongues of Men" by Edward Childs Carpenter — "Welcome Stranger" by Aaron Hoffman — "In a Garden" by Philip Barry — "The Pipes of Pan" by Edward Childs Carpenter — "The Old Soak" by Don Marquis — "Across the Street" by Richard Purdy — "Going Crooked" by Winchell Smith and William Collier — "Erstwhile Susan" by Marian de Forest — "The Haunted House" by Owen Davis — "The Creaking Chair" by Allene Tupper Wilkes, revised by Roland Pertwee — "Not Herbert" by Howard Irving Young — "The Rear Car" by Edward E. Rose — "The Mantle of Lincoln" by Test Dalton — "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" by George Abbott and John V. A. Weaver — "The Bride" by Stuart Olivier and George M. Middleton — "A Holy Terror" by Winchell Smith and George Abbott — "Graustark" by Grace Hayward (French). Grist for the amateur's mill.

"Masks and Other One Act Plays" by George Middleton — "My Lady Dreams" by Eugene Pillot — "What Would You Do?" by Mrs. Chauncey Palmer Smith — "Showing Up Mabel" by Glenn Hughes (French). One act plays for the little theatre.

## CHANGE

By Marie Aldrich

COULD I keep this day  
Of sunlight filtering  
On yellow buttercups  
And ivy green.

It would be the shadow  
Of a cloud that has passed;  
Another will return  
But never this day.

Could I see the smile  
That curves your crimson lips,  
The allure and the deception  
In your shining eyes.

It would be a sorrow,  
And the breaking of a heart,  
A picture that has passed  
But never this day.