



MARGARET KENNEDY

*Caricature by Eva Herrmann*

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## THE THEATRE

by Francis Fergusson

*Editor's note: THE BOOKMAN herewith resumes its monthly review of the New York theatre, a popular feature of the magazine for more than thirty years, which was suspended last season to save space for more purely literary material. So many old BOOKMAN readers have regretted the absence of a favorite department that we have become convinced, as were our editorial predecessors, that the theatre is one of the fields in which THE BOOKMAN should serve as a monthly reporter. We are particularly pleased to find in Mr. Francis Fergusson a young critic whose work has revealed him as a worthy successor of THE BOOKMAN's distinguished line of commentators on the stage. The magazine's first critic was Norman Hapgood, in the nineties and the early years of the century. He was followed by Frank Moore Colby. Later critics have been Clayton Hamilton, Walter Pritchard Eaton, Montrose J. Moses, John Farrar, Louis Bromfield, Larry Barretto, Robert Benchley, and Ernest Boyd. Mr. Fergusson's first paper deals with a group of plays of the early season having some literary association, whether dramatizations of novels or revivals of classics.*

*Next month he will take up revues and comedies.*

THE story of *Bad Girl* is the life-history, in the biological sense, of the flat-dweller. It is concerned with the phenomena of courtship, reproduction, and the struggle for existence. In Scene I we see the anatomy and physiology of the seduction. If this episode were given the slightest twist, just a bit of judicious heightening, it would be a Rabelaisian masterpiece. If the actors relaxed their concentration for a moment it would be unendurably vulgar. As it is, audience and actors alike stare with fascinated single-mindedness at the episode itself, practically without comment, except for an occasional embarrassed titter from a flat-dweller who breaks in the audience.

This gives an indication of the excellence of the acting of Paul Kelly and Sylvia Sidney. Paul Kelly produces a likable young dumb-bell with remarkable mastery, and with a humor which comes out best in the scenes

which have to do with his approaching fatherhood. (These scenes are the best in the play, being based on a very real misunderstanding which gives the actors a chance to act instead of suffer: each one wants to have a child and thinks the other doesn't want it.) Sylvia Sidney does almost as well as the Eve of the Grand Concourse. Her work is unacceptable only when she abandons her humor in favor of her hysterics, or when the script obliges her to argue about birth control. A loud female debate about obstetrics has no place in a light comedy. It is no fun to hear a young woman sobbing loudly. It adds nothing to the pleasure of the evening to have her scream in childbirth. What if the childbirth is incredible? The screams are undeniable, and hurt the ear. The whole entertainment is much too slight to stand this sort of thing.

The play, in fact, which is a dramatization,