

After the Play

THE farces of Georges Courteline did not exist for me till I went to see Boubouroche performed by the Theatre Guild, but now I am a happier and wiser man. Most farces, as a rule, have but one purpose, to make you laugh. Anxious theatrical promoters stand in the wings while comical accidents are multiplied on the stage, and nothing allays the promoters' anxiety except a huge number of laughs. These men register mirth on a chart. They can tell you that by 9.14 P. M. there ought to be X number of laughs in any farce by Avery Hopwood, and if Avery Hopwood has to produce the guffaws by processes best not described that fact goes completely unmentioned. In the world of successful American farce, a dirty dollar bill is as good as a clean bill, and a laugh is a laugh.

With Georges Courteline, apparently, the farce has a rather different intention. He applies it not to the physical conduct of his people, which is quite restrained, but to the human folly they illustrate. That main folly, in Boubouroche, is the illusion of love. M. Courteline knows very well that all love is not equally blind but what gives him his farce is one cleverly chosen situation built around an amiable numskull, and so he enables us to take sweet vengeance on the fatuity of love.

Boubouroche, acted with delightful gusto by Mr. Arnold Daly, is the benevolent gentleman who pays the rent for Adèle at 111 boulevard Magenta. Boubouroche believes, nay knows, that Adèle is everything that his heart could desire—amiable, unselfish, devoted, faithful. He expands, he glows, at the thought of Adèle. He tells his café companion how Adèle dawned on his shy and shrinking life and how he warmed to her as to the most perfect foot-warmer a human being ever had.

Then we see Adèle, with her other lover, in the bosom of the apartment at 111 boulevard Magenta, for which Boubouroche pays the rent. But the scene is anything but romantic. It is pedantically domestic. André, Boubouroche's rival, has the perfect marital tone. As he sits mending his bicycle horn he talks with lachrymose restraint of all his disadvantages, his undignified position as a lover who must be concealed in the wardrobe every time the bell rings. (The bell rings repeatedly.) When the unsentimental portrait has been completed, the bell sends André once more to cover and the ample Adèle (Miss Olive May) admits Boubouroche, who has meanwhile learned that he is being deceived. A comfortable, fatuous man forced to avenge his honor, Boubouroche starts to bluster quite as automatically as André had complained. Adèle remonstrates, elocutes, reproaches, ascends the pedestal. An unfortunate accident, however, reveals André just at the moment she had convicted Boubouroche of being an idiot. André presents Boubouroche with his card and stalks out of the apartment in distinguished indignation. Then the separation commences which Boubouroche is too big a baby, and Adèle too good a manager, to desire. Her fertile mind at last hits on the idea that André is a painful family secret, and Boubouroche grasps at the explanation through his sorrowing tears. They become reconciled. They chirrup to each other. The last tableau is Peace, blessed Peace—peace at any price. It is, of course, a caricature, but it is one of those easy, irreverent, ironical caricatures which shows a quite wonderful knowledge of life. Not to see and enjoy it is to miss one of the very best productions this year. The Wife with a Smile, on the same program, is not of the same calibre. It is a modern provincial French tragic-comedy in two acts, written by Denys Amiel and André

Obeys and acted by Blanche Yurka, Arnold Daly and a sound cast. As the excruciated wife of a coarse mercantile husband, Miss Yurka seemed to me too melodramatic to evoke the comedy which was definitely intended. But the play itself has an amateur quality after the deft farce of M. Courteline.

FRANCIS HACKETT.

ONE more gesture in quest of a native American art of the ballet was made recently by those who enabled Miss Ruth Page, one time aide to Pavlova and later partner of Bolm, to appear in *matinée recital* at the Apollo Theatre as solo ballerina. And while the event gave evidence once more of the discouraging distance of the desired goal, it afforded example of one of the means of attaining it. Importations, whether they come from Russia or from Burma, have served their purpose of pointing the way and setting standards; and henceforth, if we are to make any original progress, we must train our own artists of the dance, both those of creation and of execution. And the soundest policy in that course of training is to thrust on them that measure of responsibility which will stimulate without confusing.

The ideal conditions for the growth of a native ballet, of course, would presuppose a tradition of the dance, a school or schools where children could be trained while still supple and amenable both physically and spiritually, and an audience at one and the same time critical and sympathetic. Lacking not one but all of these conditions, we shall have to be grateful when some zealot like Miss Severn or Miss Page dares to defy conditions, starts training at an age when Russians would deem attainment impossible and with courageous naïveté presumes an audience which does not yet exist in ponderable numbers. They are, perhaps, the pioneers of a tradition, the stimulants to a school, the creators of an audience.

Less mature and resourceful than Miss Severn, Miss Page seems to me, on the contrary, to be on a surer path toward achievement: her appearance in solo is evidence of her ambition to stand alone, but she has not cut the bonds which tie her to her master. Instead, she is merely taking advantage of Mr. Bolm's desire that she learn to be an independent. Less headstrong and self-reliant than Miss Severn, she may not for some time be so superficially "effective". It all depends on the quality of her latent imagination and its awakening. Her course is the right course, the only course to a full realization of her powers. She has acquired technical proficiency astonishing to those who believe training impossible beyond the age of ten or twelve. The indications of a fertile imagination are evident in *The Poisoned Flower*, a Siamese dance-legend of her own devising. Her work in solo is still inferior to that in association with her master. But in the ballet, as in bridge, you'll never find out where the ace is by waiting.

The most discouraging thing about our quest for a native ballet is the lack of supervising and directing minds. It is in the nature of the dance that dancers themselves should devise and create the media of their art. Pavlova, Mordkin, Miassin, Bolm have all held the reins over the Baksts and the Stravinskys. But where is the American Mamontoff, the American Diaghileff, the American patron and Maecenas who alone will take the aristocratic interest in the art of the dance which a democracy cannot be expected to assume? Our twin operas make pretenses, but they are half-hearted. We shall probably have to await zealots in this field who are as willing to defy conditions as the performer.

OLIVER M. SAYLER.

The Story of Mankind

The Story of Mankind, by Hendrik Willem Van Loon.
New York: Boni and Liveright. \$5.00.

MR. VAN LOON'S book inexorably suggests a comparison with the recent excursion into universal history by Mr. Wells. Indeed Boni and Liveright are at some pains to inform us that their author thought of the matter long before the English novelist discovered the potentialities, literary and economic, of a general history. This was unnecessary. Those who know anything about the two authors do not need this explanation. Mr. Van Loon was known as an ingenious and brilliant historical student for many a long year before Mr. Wells burst all ablaze into the firmament, accompanied by his satellite assistants. Mr. Wells is a popular novelist, a tireless writer, and a successful diner out. All the head and lion hunters are, for this brief day, upon his trail. Mr. Van Loon loves a good dinner too, but since boyhood he has labored with pick and hammer in the stuff of history. It does not appear that he discovered the Fabian Society early in his youth, but, master as he was of a dozen languages, he read far and wide in the sources while the star of hope was on his brow.

Here is the fruit of much labor. It is a book of four hundred and sixty-six pages on the history of man from the stone age to the triumph of W. W. at Paris. Two hundred and fifty pages bring us down to the Protestant Reformation. The Nineteenth Century gets about a hundred pages. Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, Mohamet and Napoleon have headings of their own. All the rest of the great are buried with the little actors and the masses. Pre-historic man, the Nile Valley, Greek city states, the Roman empire, feudalism, the mediaeval city, learning in the Middle Ages, the great discoveries, the Reformation, the English revolution, mercantilism, the French Revolution, the industrial revolution, the Holy Alliance, science, art, and imperialism are all here arranged in order. Though the volume is for children and will be read with delight by them, the wisest adult in the land will be still wiser if he pores over its pages.

Mr. Van Loon, like all real human persons, is playful and wayward, and he slams his historical characters about as a joyful child handles its dolls, but he nevertheless walks with firm feet along the path marked by the ascent of man. Ever since Mark Twain ventured upon the sacrilege of picturing the Tsar of all the Russians taking a bath in a large cold room, even doctors of philosophy have suspected that history is not all dress parade. Mr. Van Loon learned that very long ago. Yet, enamored as he is of Irony and Pity, he never has a fit after the fashion of Mr. Wells.

Fathers and mothers who sit in silence before the flickering fire and wonder how best to equip their children to fight the powers of folly and darkness will find Mr. Van Loon a far safer guide than the English novelist. Mr. Van Loon knows a thousand times more history and writes with as much taste and more humor. Moreover he has drawn amusing and entertaining maps and pictures that really illuminate the text. Some of the pictures assume, perhaps, too much knowledge on the part of the youthful readers. It must be remembered that in art as in literature we see what is behind our eyes. It may be questioned whether Greece is best represented by two massive columns standing out in solitary grandeur against a blue sky. Would not some slight dream of Phidias be better? Who knows?

Movement and Color attract the interest of children

and Mr. Van Loon has written for them. Still, there is a rich background to all his chapters, a background that can be seen by those that have eyes to see. In this respect the *Story of Mankind* is a sort of Robinson Crusoe. Moreover there are scattered here and there paragraphs as solid as one could find in any *Grundrisse und Grundbedingung*. Take this passage on falling Rome:

Rome could not endure. Her young men were killed in her endless wars. Her farmers were ruined by long military service and by taxation. They either became professional beggars or hired themselves out to rich landowners who gave them board and lodging for their services and made them 'serfs' . . . a part of the soil upon which they worked, like so many cows and the trees. The slaves . . . lost all interest in the affairs of this world which had proved such a miserable place of abode. They were willing to fight the good fight that they might enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. But they were not willing to engage in warfare for the benefit of an ambitious emperor . . . in the land of the Parthians or the Numidians or the Scots.

When Mr. Van Loon comes to the modern reformers and the labor movement he speaks with the same strong sense of reality. Like all our urban minded brethren, however, he thinks lightly of the peasants and passes them by on the other side as he wades through the French Revolution. That is a fault which should be corrected in another edition. Here's hoping there may be many!

Now to the heart of the matter. What is the underlying philosophy or chief suspicion of the author? On the very last page, headed *As It Ever Shall Be*, Mr. Van Loon gently informs us that we should choose Irony and Pity as our guides. Irony disarms us with her mirth and teaches us to laugh at rogues and fools whom, but for her, we might be so weak as to despise and hate. Very good. This reminds us of the solemn ending of Bishop Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*: "All those who are engaged in the work of government find themselves subject to a higher power. They always do more or less than they intend and their counsels have never failed to have unforeseen effects. They are not masters of the turn in affairs given by the ages past. Neither can they foresee what course the future will take. Far less can they force it."

But Mr. Van Loon surprises us on the page just preceding, which is naturally read immediately after the last page, by saying of the wormeaten, water-logged ship of state: "Some day a man shall arise who will bring the vessel safely to port, and he shall be the hero of all the ages." I fear that after the author passed his plate proofs, the publishers, following the style of moving picture producers, inserted the inevitable "happy ending." As for myself I like Bossuet on this point: "It is God who forms kingdoms and gives them to whomsoever he will. He knows how to make them, in His own good time and scheme of things, subservient to the designs He hath upon the people." Hard headed rationalists may substitute "cosmic process" or "economic determinism" or "natural forces," but we are still left stranded upon the island of uncertainty. The thing that puzzles me is what new schemes may be thought-up by restless saloon Bolsheviks after we get "safely to port." Let Mr. Van Loon write another book, illustrated, on the point.

For grasp on historic fact, for style, and for insight, I prefer plain Mr. Van Loon (without his Ph. D.) to Bishop Bossuet or Bishop Wells. He has written a great book, one that will endure. CHARLES A. BEARD.