

Beauty and the Beast

He Who Gets Slapped: a play in four acts, by Leonid Andreyev. Translated from the Russian by Gregory Zilboorg. The Garrick Theatre, January 9, 1922.

AT the Garrick now the Theatre Guild is presenting one of the most charming plays of the season. Under the picturesque title of *He Who Gets Slapped* there unfolds for us a story of a wise man who having found his wife and his trusted friend false to him and that the world did not understand him, comes at last and joins Papa Briquet's circus. There he finds the beautiful maiden, Consuelo, who loves the handsome bareback rider, Bezano. But her supposed father, Count Mancini, the decayed aristocrat, a droll figure with his odd clothes and his pompous airs, wishes Consuelo to wed the baron, a fat, horrid man but blessed with much gold. The lion-tamer, Zinida, loves Bezano also, and has strange ideas about her red lion's loving her. He—which is the name the newcomer assumes when he buries his life and its secrets in the ranks of the circus—has the droll wish to be slapped; and it turns out that the audience thinks this very funny indeed. He falls in love with Consuelo, who is a simple girl quite unable to understand the great love of the poor clown or his wise, quaint sayings. Finally the baron, since he cannot have Consuelo any other way, proposes marriage to her father, the count, who accepts with alacrity. On her farewell day in the ring the baron has Consuelo's whole path carpeted with red roses. All the circus people are invited to drink champagne during one of the intermissions, the bride's health and happiness, at the rich baron's expense. But Consuelo, though too innocent to know what fate really confronts her with the loathsome baron, is hysterical when he merely touches her. He, the clown, seeing all this, gives her a drink of poison and takes the same for himself. And so he saves her from the horror of this beast that was to possess her, and he dies with her, happy that he can meet her in worlds to come and lay his love forever at her little feet.

For such a story as this the acting at the Garrick is excellent, exactly keyed; though Mr. Calvert's rôle and his art happen to be such as might fit into quite another play also. And Mr. Simonson's setting for all this is charming, the picturesque properties of the scene especially; though the use of different levels and the fine line of arches at the back might imply a graver and bigger idea than its play shows. Miss Gillmore is not an actress yet, for her technique is still in the school-girl stage, but she has an appealing quality and a genuine feeling for the tragic little life that she portrays. He—Mr. Bennett—is perhaps a little mild, but loveable and quaint and pathetic. Miss Westley as Zinida smokes her cigarettes and swaggers about quite as a true lion-tamer in such a romance would do. And Mr. Frank Reicher, in spite of his forcing all the time and registering too much and too often in a tiresome movie manner, is every inch the Italian count of the stage, with his walk, his ridiculous voice, his lofty ways. Mr. Rutherford's Bezano smacks his lips down too much over his words when he talks; but he is a fine, strong young fellow, a hundred percent man, just such a lover as Consuelo would choose. Except for a phrase now and then that threatens to complicate the true meaning of the story and except for a little foreign something which even the simplest person in the audience scents as being mysterious and Russian, the play sails smoothly; and if

one tends to sag at any time into depths of perplexity, a single look at Mr. Reicher mincing and jerking about so drolly or at Mr. Bennett's soft mass, will serve to reassure one of the loveable and engaging atmosphere of the piece. It is all as quaint and sad and adorable as an old fairy story; the hints and mysteries and provocative sayings that are left here and there only add a certain originality and modernity. This play is delightful and well worth doing for itself, I think, and one of the best things in town. It is wistful and appealing all through, and, what's more, it is always consistent.

But there can be no harm surely in speaking also of the play that Andreyev wrote and that is known in Russia; or in saying that the Guild production is wrong, though consistently wrong, throughout, and that it departs from the real play to an extent which, if it only went in the reverse direction, would make it an important original creation.

He Who Gets Slapped is the story of a man, a philosopher, who leaves the world which has never understood him and which has cheapened all his finest thoughts—a motive that has a simpler parallel in his wife's desertion of him for his inferior imitation—and comes to join a circus. Here under the clown's ridiculous garb he will say his great thoughts, tell the crowd what wise and beautiful ideas arise in him, and get himself slapped and laughed at for a fool; when all the while the mockery and the jest are at their expense. In the company there is Consuelo, not a mere young girl, but the figure of all beauty, white and rose and gold, ignorant of the world, untouched. And there too is Bezano, beautiful, cruel, destroying, as life and passion are destroying. He, the clown, loves Consuelo for herself and because she is the image of all beauty. And in the end he kills her to save her from the defilement of the baron's hands; and he dies with her, following beauty out of the world as he had followed it all his life, and slapped and jeered and misunderstood to the very last by the crowd about him.

This is Andreyev's play, a tragic fantasy around the ironical career that truth and distinction meet at the hands of the common mass of men. *He Who Gets Slapped* is not a great play. The beginning is superb, especially the passages where the mysterious stranger states his reasons for joining the circus and his philosophy of life—difficult and suggestive passages which seemed to be shortened in the Guild production—but the end of the play spreads out into a looser hold and—though this indefinable and insoluble mood may very well enhance a certain effect—lacks the sense of fine artistic control. So that it remains a remarkable second-rate play, but one of the most remarkable in the modern theatre. *He Who Gets Slapped* is a bitter, lovely thing, full of an intellectual passion in which all beauty is exalted and the drabness and commonness of men is perpetually mocked. Its poetry is glowing and bitter and cruel at bottom; its pathos under the picturesque poignancy is profound and elusive and sinister; and the gaiety and bustle of its action is an irony on the foolish stir of our living above its hidden depth and beauty, the life of the soul in the midst of the circus.

All this quality underlies the character of He himself. But would anyone mistake Mr. Bennett for anything beyond a dear, droll, plump, romantic booby, never very keen, never very complex, never bitter and mordant, though very generous and arch and loveable and pathetic? And in the Zinida at the Garrick where is the smouldering tragic darkness of the magnificent animal, the command, the tiger burning bright? Mr. Calvert's art is consummate; Mr.

Travers as Jackson, the clown, is good in the first scene. But the worst acting of all, if we take the play from Andreyev and not from the surrounding version, is that of Mr. Frank Reicher. For the part of Mancini, Andreyev in his directions is explicit enough: the count is ragged in places, macabre, absurd, fallen so low that the only place for his lording it is among these circus people. Mancini is used as an ironical underscoring of the central character; for exactly as the case of He, the thinker, presents a mockery of the mind and imagination and truth, so Mancini, the nobleman, carries about him a travesty of fallen aristocracy and of what happens to these high aristocratic qualities of pride and form and style in the individual himself and in the crowd's opinion of them when they are no longer sustained by money. Mancini is a fantastic satire in black and white against the color of his surroundings. But Mr. Reicher only minces and struts around like the French count in old-fashioned melodrama; and misses entirely the deeper,

grave and bizarre and tragic absurdity that life has come to in this man.

In a sense the Guild production is more of a unit than Andreyev's play. Andreyev took something of an old-style clown story and roughened and weighted the texture with his extravagant comment and fecundity; and this Guild production smooths it back again to the simpler story. Nearly everything in the play fits together now; though it must be said that the resulting harmony is like reducing the wind and the elements of the world to a melody played on a music-box.

In this pleasing fashion the performance was one that I enjoyed; and I am thankful to the Guild for undertaking even one of the many plays that lie in this curiously difficult and modern drama. And then, having enjoyed it, I may remark on so perfect an example of how art—as well as life—tends on its weaker side to evade the sting of reality and truth.

STARK YOUNG.

COUNTRY SONGS

Old Soldier

We wander now who marched before,
Hawking our bran from door to door,
While other men from the mill take their flour,
So it is to be an Old Soldier.

Old and sore, one's like to the hound
Turning up the stiff frozen ground,
Nosing the mould, with the night around:
So it is to be an Old Soldier.

And we who once rang out like a bell,
Have nothing now to show or to sell;
Old bones to carry, old stories to tell:
So it is to be an Old Soldier.

Lament

I walk by the shore of a lake
Where stones drag wet through a wood,
And I hear the cry of a bird—
Lone, lone.

It cries to the lake, and it cries
To the stones, and it cries to the wood,
And it cries to my own slow blood—
Lone, lone.

And once I walked by this lake,
And I heard a like cry from a bird,
Nor knew what its grief forebode—
Gone, gone.

Now the child who gathered the nuts,
And brought them to me through the wood—
The child who gathered the nuts,
That day, from our life is gone.

The Poet

"The blackbird's nest, in the briar,
The sea-gulls' nests on the ground
They are nests, and they're more than nests," he said,
"They are tokens I have found.

"Here, in the rain-dashed briar
That's a mark in the empty glade,
The blackbird's nest is left," he said,
"Clay-rimmed, uncunningly made,

"By the inland lake, its shore,
Where the surgeless water shoves,
The sea-gulls have their nests," he said,
"As low as the cattles' hooves."

I heard a poet say it,
The sojourner of a night;
His head was to the rafter,
Where he stood in a candle's light.

"Like the sea-gulls' nests your houses—
Scattered they are and low;
Like the blackbird's nest in the briar—
Uncunningly made—even so.

"But close to the ground are they reared,
The wings that take widest way,
And the birds that sing best in the wood," he said,
"Are bred with their breasts to the clay.

"You've wildness—I've turned it to song;
You've strength—I've turned it to wings;
The welkin's for your conquest then;
The wood with your music rings."

I heard a poet say it,
The sojourner of a night;
His head was to the rafter,
Where he stood in a candle's light.

PADRAIC COLUM.