

# The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

## Rip Van Winkle Goes to the Play

Reviewed by JAMES L. FORD

**D**R. MATTHEWS began his theater-going in the early sixties, and during the years that have elapsed since that time has been a conscientious student of the stage, not only in this country, but in England, France, and Germany as well. I know of no man whose knowledge of dramatic literature is wider or more authentic than his, and, as he has put his knowledge to the supreme test of writing successful plays, what he has to say in the volume now under consideration may be regarded with respect.

His book<sup>1</sup> consists of eleven separate essays, all dealing with the theater in its many and varied aspects, and, of these, nine are devoted to the play and two to the art of acting, a proportion not unusual with writers of academic thought. The amount of information offered is apt to prove bewildering to the average American play-goer, who desires nothing from the theater but two hours and a half of entertainment before bedtime. The European play-goer, on the other hand, demands, in addition to entertainment, something to take home with him in his mind for future brooding, and it is to the last-named class that Dr. Matthews addresses himself.

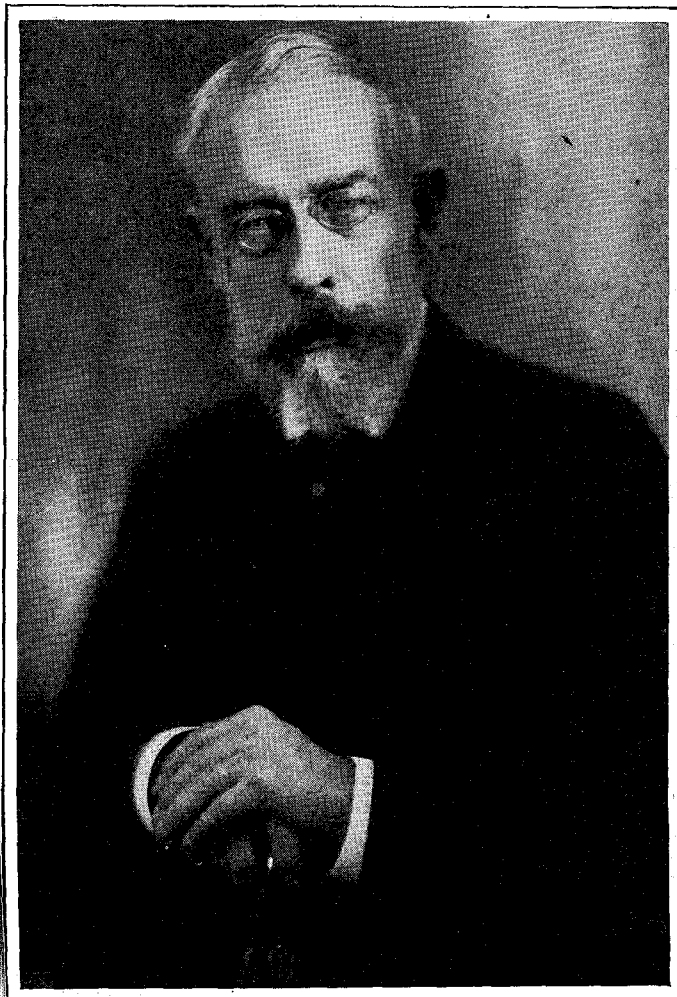
But there is much of what this Rip Van Winkle says that will interest even the uninformed theater-goer and help him to a keener and fuller enjoyment of dramatic art than ever before. Veteran play-goers will find special pleasure in Dr. Matthews's memories of the New York stage as he knew it in his early boyhood, of the plays now deemed old-fashioned, but fresh and vital then, which first turned his childish mind to the subject on which he is now a recognized authority. There was "Jeanie Deans," at Laura Keane's theater, which inaugurated his theater-going in January, 1860. Later he saw Edwin Forrest in "Macbeth," Edwin Booth in "Hamlet," Lester Wallack in "Rosedale," as well as "The Black Crook" and those wonderful pantomimists, the Ravels. From this roster it will be seen that the author's studies of the New York stage rest on a firm foundation.

Within the limits of a single review it is impossible to touch more than a few of the high spots in Dr. Matthews's careful and extended consideration of his subject. That his faith in the sort of dramatic construction that produces the "well-made" play is fully justified by the chronicles of our own theater will be evident to every reader. Not until those dramas in which a striking character embodied in a flimsy theatric framework were succeeded by the plays of such writers as Bronson Howard, William Gillette, Augustus Thomas, and Clyde Fitch did American plays stand the test of export to England. The author might have added that, although "Rip Van Winkle," one of the earliest American plays to gain popularity in England, was a one-part piece, exploiting a single character, it was nevertheless extremely well constructed, the work of that master hand, Dion Boucicault, who

succeeded when half a dozen of his contemporaries had failed in their attempts to adapt Washington Irving's story to the theater.

So frequently is the charge of plagiarism raised against authors that Dr. Matthews's chapter on "Second-Hand Situations" is worthy of special attention. After relating several instances of supposed plagiarism on the part of writers of fiction, he reveals himself as an apologist for those dramatists who have made use of situations previously employed.

"It was only the smartness of juvenility which permitted the definition of a plagiarist as 'a writer of plays.' There are plagiarists who are writers of plays, no doubt; there always have been and there always will be. In fact, some of the most prolific playwrights have been unable to clear themselves of this charge, the elder Dumas, for one, and Sardou, for another; but it is only fair to point out that these two dramatists, even if now and again they were caught with their hands in the pockets of earlier au-



Brander Matthews

Photograph by Bachrach.

<sup>1</sup> Rip Van Winkle Goes to the Play. By Brander Matthews, Emeritus Professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia College. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$2.

thors, had always a comfortable balance in the bank, that is to say, they were also and beyond all question inventors of persistent originality, from whom their contemporaries and their successors have often borrowed."

As an example of the manner in which a thrilling situation has been used more than once, and always with equal effect, Dr. Matthews recalls the play "Jessie Brown; or, The Relief of Lucknow," written more than sixty years ago, in which the beleaguered British are saved at the last moment by the arrival of a Scotch regiment which takes the Sepoys in the rear. A few years later J. J. McCloskey's "Across the Continent" showed a company of whites besieged in a railroad station on the plains and saved from their savage foes by the arrival of a train filled with soldiers. Some years later David Belasco and Franklin Fyles used a similar situation of unexpected rescue in "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and more recently William Archer employed the same device in the "Green Goddess" with an airplane. Not one of these dramatists could be accused of plagiarism, for the situation was brought about legitimately by the action of the drama and there was no other outcome possible.

Dr. Matthews's memories of famous players whom he has known on, and sometimes off, the stage take his readers as far back as the days when as an immature critic he saw Charlotte Cushman as Queen Katherine and Meg Merrilies, Ristori as Lucrezia Borgia and Marie Antoinette, and Miss Neilson as Juliet. Among those who have appealed most successfully to his more mature judgment were Modjeska, Duse, Salvini, Booth, Irving, Coquelin, John T. Raymond, Nat Goodwin, E. L. Davenport, and Clara Morris, and with many of these he maintained close personal relations.

No more interesting and valuable passages are to be found in the book than those which deal with Augustin Daly and the different artists whom he developed, notably Clara Morris and Ada Rehan. Miss Morris, who came to New York after some years of stock work in the Mid-West, created a sensation on the occasion of her debut under the Daly management as Anne Sylvester in "Man and Wife," and repeated her success in such emotional dramas as "Article 47," "Alixé," and "Miss Multon." Miss Rehan, on the other hand, made her first appearance as a tall, gawky girl in an unbecoming bathing-suit, and created no impression whatever. Yet under Mr. Daly's training she lived to become New York's favorite comedy actress and to

**mail this coupon for  
California Picture  
Book [free] also  
descriptive folders  
of trains and  
trip ~**

Mr. W. J. Black, Pass. Traf. Mgr., Santa Fe System Lines  
1134 Railway Exchange, Chicago, Ill.  
Please send (free) California Picture Book, and folders descriptive of trains and trip  
to California.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City and State \_\_\_\_\_



## 5 daily trains to **California** this winter including **The Chief** new Santa Fe train de-Luxe

You really enter sunny California the moment you step aboard one of the five famous Santa Fe cross-continent trains.

The new Chief—extra fare—is the finest and fastest of the Santa Fe California trains. Only two business days on the way. Daily beginning Nov. 14, 1926.

\$10.00 extra fare from Chicago and \$8.00 from Kansas City. For luxury—supreme comfort—and charming refinement it is unparalleled in the world of transportation.

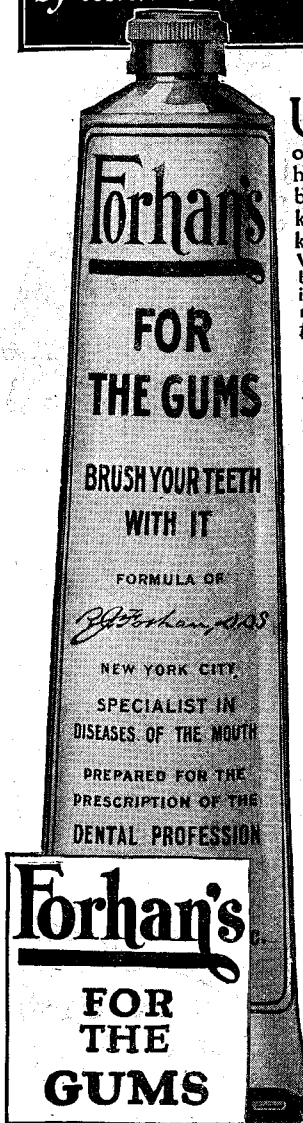
Fred Harvey Club and Dining car service sets the standard.

You will want to take the Indian-detour—by Harveycar through the land of prehistoric America. Also stop at Grand Canyon.

*In writing to the above advertiser please mention The Outlook*



*Unhealthy gums denoted  
by tenderness and bleeding*



**UNHEALTHY** soil kills the best of wheat. Unhealthy gums kill the best of teeth. To keep the teeth sound keep the gums well. Watch for tender and bleeding gums. This is a symptom of Pyorrhea, which afflicts *four out of five* people over forty.

Pyorrhea menaces the body as well as the teeth. Not only do the gums recede and cause the teeth to decay, loosen and fall out, but the infecting Pyorrhea germs lower the body's vitality and cause many serious ills.

To avoid Pyorrhea, visit your dentist frequently for tooth and gum inspection. And use Forhan's For the Gums.

Forhan's For the Gums will prevent Pyorrhea—or check its progress—if used in time and used consistently. Ordinary dentifrices cannot do this. Forhan's will keep the gums firm and healthy, the teeth white and clean. Start using it today. If gum shrinkage has set in, use Forhan's according to directions, and consult a dentist immediately for special treatment.

35c and 60c tubes in U. S. and Can.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D.D.S.

FORHAN CO.  
New York

Forhan's, Ltd.  
Montreal

**SOUTH  
AMERICA**

**\$975 and UP**  
includes all expenses  
Including Rio de Janeiro for 3-day MARDI GRAS.  
**60 Day  
Cruise Tour  
FEB. 5<sup>th</sup> to APRIL 5<sup>th</sup>**

ALL outside cabins, meals on board; room and meals at first class hotels; conducted sightseeing.

Other cities visited include Sao Paulo—Montevideo—Buenos Aires—Santos—Trinidad—Barbados—San Juan, Porto Rico.

South America enjoys Summer weather during this cruise tour. Magnificent scenery Continental atmosphere.

The Cruise ship "VANDYCK" is one of the famous V-Fleet. Built for tropical voyaging. All outside staterooms. Wide decks. Swimming pool. Satisfying cuisine.

**LAMPORT & HOLT LINE**

Apply to Sanderson & Son, Inc., Room 104,  
26 Broadway, New York, or local tourist  
agency, for illustrated literature.

sustain the leading parts in some of Shakespeare's plays.

In conclusion, I may say that Dr. Matthews has given us a most scholarly

book of the American theater, one that is in marked contrast to the superficial work of nearly all the commentators of to-day.

## Biography

**ALLEGRA.** By Armistead C. Gordon. Minton, Balch & Co., New York. \$2.50.

"Allegra" (a life of Byron) is one of the many recent biographies which take their form and color from the novel. It is among the most interesting of them. Byron's life is particularly rich in material, and the author has carefully followed facts. The poet's life from the cradle to his death in Missolonghi is a tragic example of how really bad an enemy a man can be to himself. The book starts with events long before Byron's birth, and in his heritage from the dissolute line of Byrons and the "wild Gordon's of Gight" on his mother's side there is much to explain the character of the turbulent genius. A morbid consciousness of his lameness darkened his life. In his youth he was known as "Mrs. Byron's crookit deevil." At the time he met Clare Clairmont he was "young, famous, and wicked." She was the daughter of William Godwin and the widow Clairmont. Since she was young, poor, and vain, and brought up to regard marriage as a useless institution, the attentions of the picturesque poet and peer went to her head. Their love affair is a tragic story.

Byron's later treatment of her, and of their daughter Allegra, is one of the blackest marks against him. Only one chapter of the book is devoted to the brief life of the child for whom it is named. Unable to support herself and her child, Clare agreed that Allegra should go to her father. Byron placed her in a convent, where at the age of five years and three months she died, alone and neglected. Grief and remorse now lay heavily on his stormy soul.

For a few comparatively happy months preceding her death Byron, Shelley, and their friend Trelawney wandered together on the shores of the Bay of Spezia. Then tragic events began to crowd close. Allegra's death was followed by the death of Shelley. Sick in mind and body, and bored with his latest mistress, the beautiful Countess Guiccioli, Byron prepared for the strangest adventure of a wild and powerful imagination. Picturing himself as the savior of Greece, he sailed with a small company to further the cause of the Greek insurgents. They landed at Metaxata. From here he went to Missolonghi, on the mainland, where "he exhibited remarkable business capacity and energy, and was industrious in his attention to all the details of his military duties."

On April 19, 1824, George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron of Rochdale, died at Missolonghi, as he had lived, "playing to the galleries." After his burial at Hucknall-Torkard, "the greatest tragedy of the century" was perpetrated when the manuscript of Byron's Memoirs was burned. "Allegra" takes sides with Byron's defenders. The author repudiates the horrid story of the poet's alleged relations with his half-sister, Augusta, and says, "If his errors were greater than those of ordinary men, so were his temptations and provocations."

**MOHAMMED.** By R. F. Dibble. The Viking Press, New York. \$3.

The new biography is no respecter of persons. Mr. Dibble applies to Mohammed the same ironic, satiric, and at times burlesque methods which he employed last year in writing of John L. Sullivan. The result is no less amusing, but it appeals us to reflect on what the faithful might think of it, in the unlikely event of its ever fall-

ing into their hands. Whether Mohammed was a profligate, a coldly calculating and atrociously barbarous hypocrite, or a humble and grateful penitent whose sole wish was to be a channel through which Allah's divine purpose might be made, are questions which Mr. Dibble poses to himself and to his readers, and "the answer forever bides," is his conclusion. Yet the image that definitely remains after the book is closed is that of a vain, sensual, quick-witted opportunist—a "grotesque, grand, preposterous, and prodigious figure." It has not, apparently, been the author's purpose to separate the charlatan from the creed.

## Fiction

**WAYS OF ESCAPE.** By Noel Forrest. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. \$2.

In its acute analysis of character this first novel seems to indicate a mature hand. Stephen Heath's unflinching success, which his townspeople called "Heath's luck," he attributed to his own foresight and sagacity. He worked on the principle that he was "the master of his fate," but he also essayed to be master of the fate of others. With the one aim of bettering the conditions of his town, beautifying it in his capacity of architect, and establishing his children as well as he had established himself in life, one would say that he did not deserve censure. But his mistake was that he ruled the town and family. The course each of his children was to follow was chosen from his own standpoint without regard for their inclination or natural bent. Terry must go into the army, though he hated the army. Basil, with literary gifts, was trained for an architect. Rosamund, who was in love with Angus, was made to marry Gervase. Tony, to win the Saxonhurst scholarship, must be kept to his books during holidays. Mrs. Heath's one function was to be beautiful, and to this end Stephen chose the colors she looked best in and, to spare her, supervised household matters, greatly irritating her, as she possessed intelligence as well as beauty. The young Heaths, who called themselves the "Heathens," held secret conclaves to devise ways of escape, and so schooled had they become in Stephen's philosophy that each selected his own way of escape with a view to paying him in his own coin. It was heartless, and Stephen reeled at every revolt, but his pride sustained him, and he never acknowledged defeat. One could wish that he had been spared the last blow, but the story is relentlessly carried out to the end, and Paul Kenyon's dubious theory that a man must pay for ascendancy in success and happiness seemed exemplified.

## Religion

**MIRACLES. A Modern View.** By Floyd L. Darrow. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$2.50.

A thorough presentation of the improbability of lawbreaking miracles, as offered us by the Scriptures and the Church, largely by destroying their uniqueness and exhibiting the frequency of similar happenings in other quarters. Reminding us how often, for instance, the gods Castor and Pollux, mounted on their white horses, are said to have saved Roman armies in the days of the Republic, Mr. Darrow says: "I submit that this heathen miracle is just as good, no more so and no less, as any other such product of superstitious imaginations in a world-wide era of lawless

In writing to the above advertiser please mention The Outlook