

►► The Latest Plays ◄◄

By OTIS CHATFIELD-TAYLOR

A NEW writer, Mr. Sheridan Gibney, has given us the first really amusing play for weeks. It is called *The Wiser They Are* and it has been presented to us by Jed Harris with his two standbys, Ruth Gordon and Osgood Perkins, in the leading parts. As to plot the thing is slight indeed but it shares another characteristic with Noel Coward's *Private Lives*—it is full of lines which in themselves are nothing but which in their context bring hearty and spontaneous laughter. In other words, comparative novice though Mr. Gibney may be he has a fine ear for the theatrical, as opposed to the literary, phrase.

For the rest of the incomplete title I presume we are expected to supply, "the harder they fall" and thus justify the author's flattering faith in our brightness, for the theme of *The Wiser They Are* is the one about the philandering young man-about-town and the almost promiscuous lass-about-the-same-village who get married all in a spirit of fun and end by being in love. The locale is one of those awfully smart bachelor penthouse apartments in New York and the bridal suite aboard ship.

However, the production which Jed Harris has given *The Wiser They Are* is not entirely worthy of the witty manuscript. The acting ranges from the near perfection of Osgood Perkins, through the painfully affected but often effective work of Ruth Gordon, down to some very amateurish emoting by a young Mr. Ben Lackland. That Perkins man is, of course, coming more and more to be recognized as technically our finest younger actor in a variety of parts. Miss Gordon, on the other hand, except for her fine work last year in *Hotel Universe* under the tasteful direction of Philip Moeller, has been getting more and more irritatingly kitchy. Since playing *Serena Blandish* she has also taken to sprinkling her speeches with a profusion of broad "a's"—in all the wrong places—"Fahncy

that," for example. My agents haven't reported to me whether Jed Harris directed *The Wiser They Are* himself or whether, as has been previously the case, he simply gave the director no credit on the program. At any rate I know it wasn't

George Kaufman or Worthington Miner who staged it, either of whom I'm sure would have established better tempo and avoided some transparent efforts at elegance that did the play no good. But I'm just being a carping old crab (if such miscegenation is possible), as the show's many merits make it a most welcome relief from some of the other vernal offerings.

A late addition to the unusually large number of the sea-

son's revivals is *Peter Ibbetson*, Lee Shubert's presentation of Constance Collier's revision of John N. Raphael's dramatization of George du Maurier's novel—if you see what I mean. I'm the fellow who never read the book, saw the play with John and Lionel Barrymore fourteen years ago, nor had the price to see the opera this past winter. Deplorable as such ignorance may be it at least enables me to judge the current production as a play being presented in the spring of 1931. Admittedly a rank sentimentalist, it is a pleasure to be able to report to others who don't mind a snuffle or two now and then that Dennis King as Peter Ibbetson is truly heartbreaking at times and that Valerie Taylor and Jessie Royce Landis lend him fine support.

The two motifs of *Peter Ibbetson*, love unfulfilled except in dreams and after death, and the story of the boy who stood everything from his foster parent except a slander on his mother's name, may seem to some old-fashioned or overly romantic, but such is the feeling of sincerity which the generally fine company under the direction of Miss Constance Collier herself manage to impart to the lines that I am sure there are many who will be really touched—even in this year of little grace.

Recommended Current Shows

Admirable Crichton: Competent production of Barrie's satire.
As Husbands Go: Typical John Golden-Rachel Crothers clean and bright comedy.
Civic Repertory: Last month before this excellent troupe takes a year off.
Fine and Dandy: Joe Cook nonsense and some good songs and dances.
Five Star Final: Arthur Byron in an earnest and exciting play about the tabloids.
Girl Crazy: Best words and music in town, by the Gershwins.
Grand Hotel: Skillfully presented thrilling events in a German hotel.
Mrs. Moonlight: Sweet, teary and occasionally witty comedy well acted.
Once in a Lifetime: Hollywood expertly kidded.
Private Lives: Deft acting in a brilliant comedy by and with Noel Coward with Gertrude Lawrence.
Sweet and Low: Rough and funny revue with some catchy songs.
The Barretts of Wimpole Street: Interesting, if spotty, play with Katharine Cornell at her best.
The Silent Witness: For those who like to guess who killed whom.
The Wonder Bar: Al Jolson as an engaging night club proprietor. No mammy songs!
Tomorrow and Tomorrow: Philip Barry's sensitively penetrating play. Beautiful acting by Herbert Marshall.
Vinegar Tree: Smart slapstick farce about Long Island life.



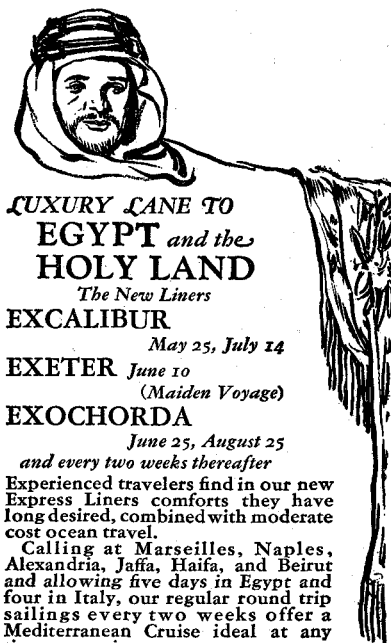
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⇒ Prose and Worse ⇐

IT IS a satisfaction to learn, at a time when business in so many lines is almost at a standstill, that there is one profession which has not suffered,—which has, indeed, shown a steady gain. Young men who are hesitating before deciding to what work they shall devote their lives will do well to consider this field. The risks are nowadays not great; the rewards are, we suppose, adequate, or so many would not be employed in it. We refer to murder. More than twice as many people were murdered in this country in 1930 as in 1900, and the rise in rate has been steady; there have been no really bad years, none which has not shown a small but satisfactory increase. Of course, the opportunities are better in some cities than in others. The young murderer, like the young doctor, should pick the town with the high death rate. New York and Chicago, contrary to the general opinion, offer no special advantages. The 1930 rate per 100,000 is respectively 6.2 and 12.1. Leaving aside the question of fractional murders, suggested by these figures—which in any case are probably not professional jobs—it would seem better to pick a town like Memphis, which, with its rate of 51.6, must be a sort of murderers' paradise. In fact, the South as a whole is much better than the North. Of course, the young American murderer will find a certain amount of competition from abroad, since the rate in England, for instance, being only one seventeenth of ours, scarcely permits its native workers to make a living, and as a result many foreign workers are being dumped in the American field. This may in time become a problem serious enough for consideration by our tariff and immigration experts, but at present our American experts, hampered by lack of national organization, have no recourse but their own personal ingenuity. At least there are two countries whose competition they need not fear. Siam and Russia both have rates higher than ours. Undoubtedly, however, with our more civilized methods this lead will soon be cut down. It is up to Americans to see that it is.

.....
 "Compared to the female body, the average milk-jug or even cuspidor is a thing of intelligent and gratifying design,—an objet d'art"—H. L. Mencken ("In Defense of Women").

When I survey my own Lenore
 Whose curves are far superior
 To milk-jug or to cuspidor,
 She dazzles me;

Yet twenty years from now, her lines
 Will have burst from their chaste confines
 And fats will vie with vitamins;
 —I can foresee

When she'll present for my conjecture
 Cuspidoric architecture,—
 Then, O Mencken, shall thy lecture
 Comfort me!

MAURICE SAGOFF.

.....
 Said A. Edward Newton
 To William Lyon Phelps:
 "I tell you what helps
 If at fame you are shootin'—
 To talk about people,
 Real important people,
 Tell how well you know 'em,
 Call 'em Ed and Billy
 Tell how Shaw laughed
 When you made that funny crack,
 Tell how Mr. Taft
 Slapped you on the back.
 You may sound silly,
 But that shows your readers
 You're in step with the leaders,
 Not ten steps below 'em."

Said William Lyon Phelps
 To A. Edward Newton:
 "You're gol darn tootin'!
 I call Morley 'Chris,'
 And I call Lewis 'Red,'
 But let me tell you this:
 It's best when they're dead.
 Live ones get shirty,
 But old Wolfgang Goethe
 And old Mig Cervantes
 Can't kick your panties,
 And nothing gets to ranklin'
 In old Ben Franklin
 If you get too familiar.
 If they're dead they can't kill ya.
 And another little trick
 That works pretty slick:
 Always prophesy fame
 For the man who has won it.
 Climb up on the steeple,
 Praise him good and loud.
 Most of the people
 Won't have heard his name;
 When they hear acclaim
 They'll think you begun it
 If you shout to the crowd.
 And if you're good at phrasing
 They'll forget the man you're praising
 And praise you instead.
 Aren't people silly!"

"Good old Ed!"

"Grand old Billy!"

WALTER R. BROOKS.

Music

Notable New Recordings

IF IT'S novelty you want, and don't mind a laugh or two at the same time, I've got just the thing for you. A new British firm, the Decca Company, has sent over two records which bear the name *Façade*¹. Why the name. I don't know. The four twelve-inch sides are taken up with eleven apparently unrelated poems by Edith Sitwell which are recited by her and Mr. Constant Lambert, whose choral and orchestral work, *Rio Grande*, I ridiculed in this column some time ago. There is an orchestral accompaniment (or interference) to Miss Sitwell's poems, composed by William Walton. I may have been doing Mr. Lambert an injustice when I patronizingly called his music silly; maybe it was meant to be after all. In this case the spectators at the first performance of *Façade* in London were told that if they felt like laughing to go ahead and laugh. Well, the whole thing is a brilliant burlesque of modern poetry and music, and I heartily recommend it. Various importers have it.

Another interesting ultra-modern work is de Falla's *Concerto*² for harpsichord, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and 'cello, with the composer at the harpsichord. For some time it has been difficult to get the whole work from the importers, as only the first half was sent over. Now you can get the whole thing from either the Gramophone Shop or the New York Band Instrument Company, and even if there were no other reasons the fine recording and Manuel de Falla's brilliant playing would make it worth the bother, and the use of the harpsichord with most up-to-date harmonies is fascinating.

Columbia have entered the Ravel *Bolero* field with a rendition by Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam which contains much of interest³. The interpretation is more like the composer's than Koussevitsky's—Mengelberg only accelerates slightly at the very end—and from the standpoint of clarity particularly the recording is the best of the three.

A most amusing dance disk has appeared, the subjects of which have stood the test of time. The Casa Loma Orchestra have a great deal of fun with *Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet* and *Alexander's Ragtime Band*⁴ and leave them as good to dance to as ever. It's a good lively band with lots of imagination.

O. C.-T.

1. Decca T. 124/5.
 2. English Columbia LFX 92/3.
 3. Columbia 67890/1 D.
 4. Okeh 41476.