

Only the Bad Goes

Gotham Must Have Its Dramas Spiced Well With Naked Wickedness

By CHARLES BELMONT DAVIS.

LULA VOLLMER returned to our stage last week with "The Dunces Boy," the locale of which, as in her "Sun-Tip" and "The Shame Woman," is a village in the Carolina mountains, and most of her characters are very plain and very primitive. The story has to do with the pretty schoolmistress of the place, who boards with the Huckle family, consisting of Pa and Ma Huckle and their only child, a half-witted boy of 19. Tude, the boy, in a part-spiritual, part-physical way, falls in love with Rosie, the schoolmistress, and to save him from heartbreak, the mother tells Tude if he touches Rosie she will fade and die just as when a cut flower is handled it will fade and die.

But Rosie is loved by two other men, who are not half-wits, and when the unsuccessful suitor of the two in a drunken frenzy attacks the girl Tude, who accidentally tumbles on the scene, believing that Rosie will die because this too passionate lover has touched her body, struggles with the man and ends by killing him. Then Tude returns to his home and, only half-conscious of what he has done, runs to a neighboring saw mill and throws himself before the great lumber saw. Not a very logical act, but then, presumably, a half-wit is not supposed to be logical.

I have seldom known a case where there was such a divergence of opinion among the critics as there has been about "The Dunces Boy." Some, in a "cheap comedy" manner, heaped abuse on it, while others lauded the play as fine drama. The two points, however, on which all agreed was the exceptional acting of Antoinette Perry as Ma Huckle and the indubitable fact that the play was one of the most, if not the most, depressing ever produced in New York. That the plot is very thin there can be no question. For the purpose of fiction there would be scarcely the material for a short story, but the main theme of the piece—the mother's love for her imperfect offspring and her obsession to make him like other, normal children—is treated in certain speeches which have not only distinction but real nobility. Miss Voller has a manner of writing for the stage that is so fluid and imaginative and her understanding of construction and characterization is so sound that it seems but a question of time when she will write a play about which there can be no disagreement of opinion and which will be welcomed as a truly great drama.

Garth Hughes left the screen (he says for all time) to play the part of the boy, who has possessed the mind of a poetic child, a woman's innocence and the body of a man, and, in my opinion, portrayed the many-sided character with considerable success. But although Hughes was the featured member of an unusually excellent cast, it was Miss Antoinette Perry who carried away the chief honors. The brilliancy of her performance shone through the all-pervading gloom of the play as a red sun forges its light through a London fog.

Of the week's productions, it was a revival of Congreve's "Love for Love" by the Provincetown group that has created the greatest discussion. And most of the talk was not about the capacity acting, the imaginative setting, the intelligent direction or the comedy itself, but the fact that any play written 200 years ago, with all the indelicacies and indecencies common to that age, should be produced in so nearly its original form.

The season of 1923-24 was, or should be, notable for the fight that our play promoters had with the police and municipal authorities to allow nudity on the stage. And, as is well known, the battle in the name of Art was won by the producers and, therefore, any night now, for \$5.50 (box office prices) at several of our best theaters we may see beautiful ladies clad exactly as they were when they made their first appearance on the world's stage. This knotty point having been settled to the satisfaction of nearly all our townsmen and country cousins, the producers have made every honest effort this season to ascertain what was the most pleasing to the ears of the theatergoing public as well as to its eyes. The result, which was not attained without a somewhat colorless conflict with the law, seems to be that what the public demands is profanity, blasphemy, salaciousness and indecency. Of course, there are many who enjoy clean plays on the stage and some of the season's successes will prove this, but no one can deny that the flood gates have been opened wide and heretofore, where film only trickled through our drama, it now rushes at full flood.

William A. Brady produced a very badly written, very badly cast play called "The Good Bad Woman." It was daring and very bad, but it was also so sordid and soiled that on the second night there were but few present to watch the machinations of the unwhorl heroine. Indeed, things looked rather gloomy for the good bad woman, and then the authorities took official notice of her demoralizing influence in our midst, and it became most difficult to purchase a seat for what I presume we should call "the show." Before the district at-

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AT THE THEATERS



Francine Dagmara AT ORPHEUM



Boreas Thomashofsky AT BRANDEIS

torney took cognizance of Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms" it was playing to about \$10,000 a week, but after it had been officially condemned as indecent business promptly jumped to \$21,000.

Numerous instances of the same sort could be quoted, but these no doubt will serve to explain why many of our theatrical entertainments should have reached so low a level. The temptings of decency set up by our puritanical forefathers for all these many generations, in one short, critical season have been howled over and, so far as our drama is concerned, we are certainly running wild.

One of our best known critics said in his review of the Congreve piece: "After seeing 'Love for Love' I am more than ever convinced that we ought to have some dirty plays if only they are funny enough." And that, it seems to me, fairly crystallizes the opinion of a great part of the public toward the modern tendency of our stage in the direction of indecency. The crime I impute to "Love for Love" is that it is not funny enough. Eliminate the indecent lines and, in spite of what seemed to me a colorful if not brilliant performance, I do not believe it would have lasted out the week. The indecencies left in, I have no doubt the piece will soon move to an up-town theater where the crowds can be accommodated. As a play there is characterization of a kind, but there is a lack of imagination in construction which is unworthy of a playwright who had learned his craft through a correspondence school. Of course, the same fault could be found with that modern artificial comedy, Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windemere's Fan," but, to my way of thinking, there is more real wit and wisdom in one page of "Lady Windemere's Fan" than in a volume of Congreve.

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ENOUGH TABLES TOPICS OF THE DAY PATHE NEWS

Thomashofsky Will Play at the Brandeis Monday Night Only

No attraction has visited Omaha which could prove as interesting to the Jewish population as will the coming of Thomashofsky to the Brandeis theater on Monday, April 13.

His Old Plug Hat Forms Stage Setting for His Famous Band

Ted Lewis distinctly belongs to the creator group of musicians. This pioneer of the jazz age, who is heading with his orchestra at the Orpheum this week, can take a piece of music and under the intensely individualistic influence of his baton—which is usually his high hat or his clarinet—he evokes a tone, a melody, a harmony and an effect that is uniquely his own.

Ted Lewis, King of Jazz, and His Big Band at Orpheum

Ted Lewis, the high-hatted tragedian of song, with his famous musical clowns, and Miss Bobbe Arnst, headline an all-star show at the Orpheum theater this week. This exceptionally fine program of feature acts has been selected for the annual celebration of National Vaudeville Artists' week.

Summer Season for the Brandeis Theater

The National Art players, an organization noted for artistic production and which has had unusual success in Brooklyn and other eastern cities, will open a spring and summer season at the Brandeis theater on Monday, May 11.

REEL REMARKS

Earl Hudson, the producer, is one of the few men in America who owns a pair of black and white German police dogs; one is Rolanda, pure white; the other is Larry, pure black.

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Nights—Orchestra, \$3.00, Balcony, \$1.50, \$2, \$2.50. Second Balcony, 90c. \$1. Thursday Matinee—Orch., \$2.50, Balcony, \$1, \$1.50, \$2, Second Balcony, 50c. Add 10 per cent tax and self-addressed envelope for return of tickets.

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All Star Cast in "The Rivals" Will Play at Brandeis Soon



Mrs. Fiske as Mrs. Malaprop and Kenneth Thomson as Capt. Jack Absolute in "The Rivals" at Brandeis, April 29-30

One of the outstanding achievements of the present theatrical season is the success of the All-Star company, presenting Sheridan's 150-year-old English comedy, "The Rivals." The enterprise was conceived by George C. Tyler and Hugh Ford, well-known theatrical producers of New York. Then came the selecting of the cast. Consider the first five artists in this cast of "The Rivals" in these characters: Mrs. Fiske as Mrs. Malaprop; Chauncey OLCOTT as Sir Lucius O'Trigger; Thomas A. Wise as Sir Anthony Absolute; and Lola Fisher as Lydia Languish. And no less care was used in selecting play-

REEL REMARKS

Harriet Sterling, one of the best-known character players of the stage, having appeared with such celebrities as Margaret Anglin, Mrs. Fiske, Etienne Walsh, Mrs. Leslie Carter and others, makes her motion picture debut in Richard Barthelme's new First National film, "Soul-Fire."

Frank Lloyd and his "Winds of Chance" company are at Banff, Alberta, shooting scenes for his picture production of the Rex Beach novel, "The National Anthem."

Drama of Love and Adventure Comes to Strand on Saturday

RICARDO CORTEZ, Jetta Goudal and Noah Beery are featured in leading roles of "The Spaniard," a colorful love drama which opens at the Strand theater next Saturday.

Burning of Rome Presented in Artistic Manner in "Quo Vadis"

THE spectacular element is an important one in the new version of "Quo Vadis," which is to open at Rialto theater next Saturday.

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One of the Six World Flight Aviators and
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