

# Talk About Plays, Players and Playhouses

**M**ERRY Christmas! And the same to you, sir, and many of them.

What a day Christmas has come to be, to be sure. Hasn't it drifted just a little bit away from its original moorings, and become a little warped in the drifting? Maybe it has. It would be funny if it hadn't, for almost everything else that has to do with human life and activity has taken on a new meaning and a wider horizon under modern conditions. How that word "modern" does creep in! It is made to bear the stress and shortcomings of a lot of people, and all because it is convenient for use—yesterday, today and forever. No doubt it has been in the mouth of man since first the animal stood up on his hind feet and began to use articulate speech in lieu of modulated grunts. That's one of the things that hasn't changed. The modern Christmas is just as much different from the original as man of today is different from man when he first began to note the changing seasons and give attention to the facts of nature about him.

Down in their hearts most people are sincerely glad that Christmas comes but once a year, even if it is accompanied by "good cheer." The development of the spirit of Christmas has quite kept pace with the modern life, until the advent of the season is no longer accompanied by the expressions of "On earth peace, good will to men" that used to be so much a part of the event. Now this isn't intended to interfere in the least with the fullest enjoyment of the gladdest holiday. The fate of Old Scrooge is too fresh in the memory for that. Yet the rush and the turmoil and the fasting and the stewing of the last fortnight seem to have been worthy of a much greater reward than is likely to come from the experiences of today. This because the day has degenerated from its original purport into a festival of gifts, almost exclusively, and the events that determined its celebration originally have nearly been lost sight of. The church has made an effort to retain the religious significance of the day, holding special services, and making it a time of joyous celebration in honor of the nativity of the Son of Man, and to some extent the atmosphere of rejoicing has been extended to include mortals at large. But the practice that has grown out of the misplaced philanthropy of some misguided lover of children who flourished in a far-off day has taken to an extent that is likely to blot out as it now overshadows the other aspects of the occasion.

Christmas, like other feasts of the Christian church, is but the result of the grafting of a pagan festival onto a Christian idea. It is certain that Christ was born at Bethlehem about this season of the year; it is also certain that the practice of feasting at the time of the winter solstice is much older than the Christian religion, and finally, Christmas was not celebrated as such until more than 300 years after the beginning of the Christian era. This matter of history has nothing in particular to do with the observation of the day, and is cited only to give a little clearer view of the perspective. The pagan feast had to do with a celebration that came at the close of one year and the beginning of another. Without any other significance than the heathen of those days before the dawn of civilization had learned the natural divisions of the year, and were sufficiently human to be willing to celebrate the completion of one task before assuming the burden of another. It so fell out that they could fitly celebrate the close of one year of toil and the beginning of another by merely continuing the feast from day to day. Coming as it did at the dead of winter, the time could hardly have been more profitably spent, and the hours wasted in seasonal work not seriously missed from the business occupation of the revelers. A better and more interesting astronomical phenomena involved did not exert any deterrent effect on the observation of the feast; if anything, it must have enhanced it, for we find among the Romans, after they had advanced sufficiently in civilization and learning to improve on the calendars that had been handed down to them from peoples gone before, that Saturnalia began before and ended after Yuletide. Even after the Christian significance had been added to the Christmas occasion the feast was conveniently prolonged until after Epiphany or Twelfth night, running the merry-making up to the 6th of January.

It was this that moved Scott in his reference to the gaiety of the event to write: "A poor man's heart through half the year. Yes, verily, and no wonder. If you stand on a toilet of the dimensions of a 'gambol' of those good old times on or about the 23d of December and keep it up until the 6th of January, it is not at all improbable that its memory will linger with you till the fourth of July at least. Just when and where the gift-giving or Santa Claus feature entered is not more certain than are a number of other details of even greater importance. It really doesn't matter a great deal. One can easily imagine that the pagan papa took some interest in his small progeny, especially those who were too young to enter with the elders of the tribe into the general orgies that accompanied the closing days of the year, and that he could exhibit this paternal feeling best by giving the child some little token, no matter what, for they had their toys in those days, too. Any number of pretty and ingenious

legends cluster around the custom, none of which are disputed and of which will serve as ample explanation.

So much for the origin of the custom of celebrating at this season of the year, and for the attendant practice of giving of gifts. It is in the latter rather than in the former that the abuse lies. And even that can be borne with in view of the further fact that practice has associated with the season one of the great fundamentals of Christianity. This has attached to the day most peculiar and reverential interest, quite apart from any other aspect, and gives it in the mind of the thoughtful an importance it never would have otherwise attained. Modern life sweeps along too swiftly for the continuance of festivals merely as such, and it is doubtless owing to the religious element of the occasion that Christmas has survived. It is certainly due to this influence that the occasion affects mankind as it does. At Christmas time men feel a charity and a benevolence they are not likely to exhibit at any other season of the year, a warmth of feeling for their fellows and a gentility that overflows the barriers set up by selfish considerations and leads them a little nearer to the ideal existence. And that is the best that can be said about Christmas. If it did nothing else, it would be a welcome feast for that one day of relaxation from the selfishness of daily existence, allowing a momentary manifestation of man's inherent interest in his fellow men.

It may be asked, "What has all this to do with the theater?" and the answer is "Nothing." The people at the theater, those who make it their business, have no interest in Christmas just the same as do other mortals, with the difference that they get little or no opportunity to indulge in it. It is a time when they, in common with others who serve the public, are driven at even higher pressure than ordinarily, and they have learned to look forward to the coming of the day with something of dread on account of the added tasks it brings with it. That is all.

That usually accurate and careful writer, Mr. Robert Burns Anstie, has allowed himself to be misled, doubtless by the press agent of an actor who aspires to succeed Joseph Jefferson in certain roles, the grand old actor had made his own, and in the latter Ocean on Sunday the following paragraph appeared:

Although Joseph Jefferson retired from active life only a few years ago, his name is still a familiar one to the theatergoer. He was born in 1812, and his last Chicago appearance in 1902, to be sure, and Boston saw him in 1903, but it is ten years since he has been west of the Mississippi, and his acting is practically an unknown quantity, except as tradition to the theatergoers of the Pacific coast.

At the Krug theater for two nights and two matinees, starting with a matinee today, "A Hot Old Time" will be the attraction. The production is greater than ever; there are catchy songs in abundance, sung by a chorus of twenty pretty show girls. The company is a large one, numbering forty people, headed by William McRobie, a comedian of more than ordinary ability, Joseph Weber, Harry Yost, Victor Stone, Florence Hughes, Minnie Jarbeau and Habette.

"After Midnight" opens in the clean, healthy surroundings of country life in the "up-state" country of New York state. The locale of the play is transferred to New York City, where the two victims of the villain's nefarious plot are finally rescued through the bravery of the good brother and the criminals are all brought to justice. It is a story of twenty pretty show girls on the stage than that of the "school for crooks," where the boy is secreted among pickpockets and sneak thieves, and that of the "Gish" in the "Red Light district," where Emily is imprisoned among degraded women. Another realistic scene is that of the Grand Central station in New York, where the kidnaping takes place. "After Midnight" comes to the Krug theater for two nights and Wednesday matinee, starting Tuesday night, December 27.

"The Hills of California" demonstrated last season that its simplicity of style and pure and natural comedy, so entirely devoid of buffoonery and horse play, suited the public fancy. It enabled Mr. Frank Bacon to display his quaint personality which is going to place him among America's greatest comedians. Mr. Bacon's supporting company includes Mr. Wilfrid Roger, a young and handsome leading man of much ability, and Bessie Stuart Bacon, whose work as "Poppy Hill," will be pleasantly remembered by her admirers of last season. "The Hills of California" will be seen at the Krug theater for three nights and Saturday matinee, starting Thursday night, December 28.

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For to make merry and happy entertainment for Christmas the Orpheum presents a bill of more than ordinary excellence. The engagement opens today and includes a special matinee Monday. The particular feature of extra interest will be John T. Kelly, formerly comedian of Weber and Fields' New York Music Hall stars, and a selected company, presenting a comical sketch, entitled "Senior McPherson." The sketch has no serious phases, being made purely for fun-making purposes. The Prosper troupe, six in number, will give their

Golden text: People say "It pleased," or "It did not please," as if there were nothing higher than the art of pleasing the public. —Schumann.

Thou art the Angel of the pool that sleeps, While peace and joy lie hidden in its deeps, Waiting thy touch to make the waters roll, In bounding ripples round the weary soul. —Henry Van Dyke on "Music."

ANCE again the day has come when the Christmas world commemorates that great first song which the Angels of Faith, of Hope and of Joy sang to the shepherds who were silently watching the sheep under their care. The song of peace and good will has been ringing all through the ages and has been the proud theme of writers and poets and musicians and artists and orators. It has seemed at times to be almost overwhelmed by the clangor and din of the strife of nations, and the clamorous ill-will of men fighting against their brother men.

Some Actor Stories.

George Ade, who recently started his friends by remaining for a week in his room in a New York hotel and submitting to a starvation cure for indigestion, is said to have written a one-act vaudeville play which many actors are bidding for, but which he refuses to allow to be produced.

The principal character in an old negro from the south, now employed as the door-keeper in a New York gambling house, is the former subject of a comedy by the colonel of the old school, is a broken gambler, and therefore no longer welcome. The boss gambler orders the negro to throw the old man out if he comes again. He does come. The negro would as soon think of ejecting an archangel as a former owner, who is shabby and hungry, but still proud.

So the faithful black confesses to having long ago stolen from him a \$500, which he never did—and insists on making restitution. The colonel reluctantly and condescendingly accepts the supposed confession and money and departs. Then the boss gambler comes in and asks if the intruder has gone. "Yes, yes, sir," says the negro; "the obtruded himself an' I throw'd him out."

Edna Wallace Hopper will come forward at the Boyd theater on Sunday night for an engagement of three nights, a special Christmas matinee to be given on Monday, in a position of leadership, having been elevated to the rank of starhood. Miss Hopper's present tour is under the direction of Frank McKee and he will present her in two plays. The main bill is an English comedy in three acts called "A Country Mouse," by Arthur Law. The curtain raiser is a one-act piece, "The March of Time," by Cosmo Gordon Lenox. "A Country Mouse" was originally produced at Charles Frohman's Prince of Wales theater, London, where it met with much success. It was afterward moved to the Criterion and between those two theaters succeeded in scoring a run of over two years in the English metropolis. Miss Hopper plays the role of Angela Muir, a shy and demure young miss, in "A Country Mouse," whose adventures in London society are the theme of the dramatist. In Miss Hopper's support are Edgar Norton, Geoffrey C. Stein, Paul McAllister, Paul Everton, Herbert Budd, Kathryn Brown, Isabel Delmont, Suzanne Westford and others.

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