

Gossip About Plays, Players and Playhouses

WILLARD in three of his best bills is an intellectual treat not enjoyed every week at the theater. For this reason the last week is marked with a red star in the Omaha. This clever gentleman, who has raised himself by sheer force until he is very nearly at the top of the list of English actors, continues by unrelenting zeal to merit the distinction that is his. His visit this season is remarkable for the production of the one-act play "The Man Who Was," in the presentation of which we see a new Willard. It is the first serious effort of this great man in the direction of tragedy, and is taken by him after due consideration of its meaning. The result cannot fail to be encouraging to him, for it has been most successful in every way. As a romantic actor and as a comedian Mr. Willard had established himself firmly. He has not fairly essayed the attempt to place himself in the list of great actors of the new school, and if his Austin Johnson may serve as a basis for opinion, it is within reason to predict that his first step, so well taken, will soon be followed by others that will see him well advanced toward the greatness that is undoubtedly his. Most interesting of all, in his new undertaking Mr. Willard has abandoned his efforts in the parts in which he has been most familiar to us, but his Cyrus Bismark and Professor Goodwillie still stand as genuine triumphs of their kind. The return of this actor will be awaited with more than common interest hereafter.

Other features of the week included "The Lion and the Mouse," the much debated play in which the problem of great wealth and its industrial, political and social aspects are exploited. This engagement was a genuine success. Another was the appearance at the Orpheum of Miss Valerie Bergere in a compressed version of "Carmen." In it Miss Bergere gives again the strongest evidence of her talent. She has the seldom found faculty of stepping on the stage, ready for an intense scene, without any of the preliminary preparation of scenes that lead up to the situation, and more than this, she is capable of elevating her audience to that stage of mental exaltation, where they will live and move with her through the passions she portrays. Her "Carmen" is almost ideal, her conception of the character being comprehensive, and her portrayal of it satisfying in all regards. Many of her admirers would like to see Miss Bergere take up more serious work than she now indulges in. The discussion engendered, however, has all to do with the propositions raised by Charles A. Klein in "The Lion and the Mouse."

Right at the outset, let us give Mr. Klein credit for being sincere. It would leave him exposed to a really unpleasant charge if he did not. For is either sincere in his attack on money, or is he sincere in his praise of it? "The Lion and the Mouse" seems to be impossible. Admitting that he is sincere, and that he has accomplished something in evidence of his earnestness, what has he done? He has merely voiced in more attractive form the vague and uncertain allegations that have been flung into our ears by the irresponsible and frequently unwashed who love to dilute on the rapidly with which our democratic institutions are dissolving under the corrosive action of concentrated wealth. He has followed in the footsteps of the yellow journal and the yellow magazine, and reiterates the sweeping charges they have made. No doubt much of the evil complained of does exist; but it is scarcely believable that even Tom Lawson, head of the Hunters of the Octopus, before whose approach the Cohorts of Combined and Corporate Wealth tremble in uncertainty, and at the sound of whose voice the Money Devil grovels in the farthest corner of his Den on Wall Street, would insist that he has reached the point at which the Klein discussion takes it up.

Politics in the United States just at present is held up to be in the worst condition imaginable. Stories of graft, and greed, and corruption in high places, and all that sort of thing, have been told us morning, noon and night, until many have made up their minds that it must all be so. Now, without defining graft in any of its modern or ancient manifestations, or some of the mourners who refuse to be comforted because of the conditions would only stop to think for a moment some little consolation might appear. In the first place, not a page of history has ever been written but shows some actor seeking personal ends through political means. Some of the pages deal with the records of grafters whose exploits make those of the most advanced and expert of their modern prototypes appear amateurish. This, of course, does not excuse the grafter. Because a man stole public money a year ago, or a century ago, does not condone the offense of the man who stole it only yesterday, or, maybe, has it in mind to steal it tomorrow. It only shows that human nature hasn't changed much during all the ages; but what little change has come has been for the better. Then consider the politician's situation. He can only get a nomination by defeating a number of members of his own party who aspire for the same place. Then, after he is nominated, he can only be elected by defeating the candidates named by one or more opposing parties. Each of these men still want the office, and they know the only way to get it is to get the incumbent out. To do this they must bring forward some proof of his unfitness to hold office. As a result each of his official acts is subject to the closest scrutiny by interested and zealous politicians, and to a more or less minute examination by a large number of disinterested citizens. Each community large enough has at least two newspapers, and one of these is certain to be in the opposition. This means that any time the officeholder does anything that deserves criticism he is publicly pilloried. Imagine yourself in this position, and figure what chance you have to go very far wrong and escape exposure.

Keep in mind again, and always, that the citizen is primarily responsible for the government. Offices in the United States are filled at elections, where each male citizen of the age of 21 has a right to express his choice by ballot. Every step from first to last is taken only by consent of the voters. This means that when you charge the United States senate or the Omaha city council with being dominated by the corporations, you charge the voters with being dominated by the corporations, for the voters are responsible. And right here lies the truth and the difficulty. The people of the United States have never taken proper interest in the elementary steps that lead to the high places of official trust and responsibility. The careless voter and the busy man who doesn't vote at all are the ones responsible for the fact that a John Burkett Ryder can call a United States senator into his private office and tell him that a judge must be removed from his place on the bench in disgrace and ruin.

But this column doesn't pretend to deal with the political situation; it is to discuss the dramatic, and in some sense the ethical value of the Klein play. The individualistic tendency manifest by Mr. Klein may be considered incidentally, and it is done specifically. The play is not

deftly built, being one of sharp contrasts, the characters being opposed to each other diametrically, and with little chance of collision save by the expedient adopted in the anti-climactic fourth act, at the expense of logic and good sense. The introduction of the mouse into the lion's den is not so improbable as that the lion at the end of a short and not especially intimate association with the mouse lost to some extent its feline nature and became in a like degree imbued with the retiring qualities of the muricide. But, in tossing his tub to the whale, Mr. Klein was sufficiently circumspect to note before doing it that the tub was round and buoyant, and would amuse the whale. He saves both the lion and the mouse by this process. The credit of the caricature is another feature. It is impossible not to associate the central characters of Mr. Klein's play with certain figures that have loomed large in the public eye for many months. John Burkett Ryder but poorly covers up the personality of John D. Rockefeller; Senator Roberts in the play answers to the name of Nelson A. Rockefeller in the United States senate; Shirley Rosemore is easily identified with Ida Tarbell, and since the play has been produced and others of its personal have been sought out and distinguished as representing some living person, it would be unfair to withhold from Joseph Medill Patterson his share in the gallery. Mr. Patterson has quite sufficiently defied fate and fathers in his espousal of socialism to warrant being set down as the Jefferson Ryder of the play. Judge Rosemore is a little difficult to place. It must be that he is purely a segment of the dramatist's brain, for no person could recall a recent example of a judge of the federal court expounding himself to removal from the bench for the cause alleged by Ryder against Rosemore.

Having established the identity of the characters, the motive of the play becomes readily apparent. It echoes the cry that has gone up so generally against domination of the dollar. Unfortunately, its language is platitudinous and its sentiments are trite. Its situations are so patently melodramatic that they lose force, and the arguments as such are weakly driven home. As has been aptly said by another, the Rosemores are not in that station of life where the depressing effects of dollarism are most felt; they belong to the class that looks up to and makes the elevation of the poor man possible. One may easily doubt if any of the Rosemores would have taken any steps against John Burkett Ryder if he had not threatened them with extinction. The demonstration made by the energetic daughter of the stricken judge's family

thus loses the quality of a quest for higher and purer purposes. We have the unpleasant picture of a Justice chasing after money with all the zest of a plutocrat; the wealth swept away because he was not clever enough to compete with the crowd he sought to train with. It doesn't excuse him that he is made a victim of the machinations of a money devil. He wanted a greater fortune than he had and sought it in speculation. The fact that he had rendered a decision adverse to the corporate interests doesn't alter the other fact in the least. This unavoidable conclusion does away with the ethical value of the Klein play.

Whatever tincture of socialist doctrine may be detected in the play is evinced by the stock utterances of Shirley and Jeff in their assaults against the position of the elder Ryder. They fall with little or no effect, for the reason that they have no force. In this country of equal opportunities no reason exists why the prudent, industrious and thrifty cannot prosper. All cannot be billionaires, nor do all want to be billionaires. But all can have a fair and reasonable share of the good things of life. Every community presents its examples of how well directed and thrifty effort prospers and how equally of how improvidence and extravagance come to grief. Railing against fortune will not mend it. To denounce the man with money will not put money into your own pocket. The rule for acquiring riches is as old as time itself. Consume less than you produce and the surplus is wealth. If you consume all or more than you produce, it is your own fault that you suffer poverty. Society is no responsibility for this condition of affairs. It is simply a law of nature that cannot be evaded. It is true that wealth is not equally distributed, nor is it ever likely to be. It seems unfair that one man should have millions and a million should have nothing; but this condition will likely exist always, just as it has from the beginning. It is no more natural that all men should be equally wealthy than that all men should be equally endowed mentally or physically. No two things in nature are exactly alike and in this lies the hopelessness of the socialist program. It may be possible to alter the conditions that now govern the distribution of wealth, so that less than 1 per cent. of rent and interest and more to the workers, but this will not change the inclination of one man to save and another to spend, and the conditions of prudent thrift and heedless extravagance will continue and men will be rich or poor ac-

ordingly as their minds are bent. "Unto him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken, even that which he hath." Aggregated wealth may be curbed in many directions, but its confinement will not abolish poverty. Poverty will continue very much as they have, and the cry of the man who seeks to eat his cake and have his cake will be heard, world without end.

Mr. Klein and his managers are reaping the harvest sown for them by the agitation that has disturbed the public mind, and are wise in determining when it was ripe for the garnering. Within a short time "The Lion and the Mouse" will be forgotten with the things that have made it possible, and the restless mind of the American people will be busy with some other evanescent discussion.

Costing Events.

This afternoon and evening at the Boyd theater the William H. West minstrel, under the direction of Sanford B. Rickaby, will be the attraction. Just as the name of Billy West was a synonym for all that is good in minstrelry while he was alive, it is being kept bright by Manager Rickaby, who has gotten together a company of the ablest exponents of black face art, and who has also provided the most elaborate and costly of environment for his production. The company is large and contains on its roster the names of the leading singers, dancers, comedians, musicians and entertainers of the country. The stay here is for one day only, a matinee and evening performance today.

On Tuesday and Wednesday evening and Thursday matinee at the Boyd Viola Allen presents Clyde Fitch's play, "The Toast of the Town." Miss Allen has scored one of the greatest successes of her career in this play. Mr. Fitch is said to have written a play which, while possessing many diverting situations, is still a drama of great excellence, and includes such touches as "The Toast of the Town" as being "a play of thrills and tears, love and laughter." It is the best made play, according to all accounts, that has come from Mr. Fitch's pen in years, which means, of course, that besides possessing all those little touches that now make a play a masterpiece, it is a well-rounded drama, worthy of the great reputation of the actress who appears in it. It was expected that Mr. Fitch would write a play for Miss Allen which would be something more than a comedy of manners, for the reason that Miss Allen is an actress whose abilities are not cramped and confined, and do not run in a single groove. She is a comedienne of delicacy and charm, and yet capable of sounding the deepest emotions of the human heart. The supporting company is of top-notch excellence, and includes Isabel Irving, Mrs. Fanny Addison Pitt, Harrison Hunter, Howard Short, Norman Tharp and C. Leslie Allen.

The bill at the Burwood, for the week beginning with a matinee this afternoon will be Sidney Grundy's famous "problem play," "Sowing the Wind." This is one of the first and best of the comedies dealing with the sex question, and presents its argument in a most compelling manner. Mr. Grundy's style is clear and concise, but most entertaining, and he argues both sides of the question with much force and fine dramatic effect. Indeed, the scene in the third act between Brabson and Rosemore is an equal for thrilling in its intensity and sustained power. The whole play is one of manners, and as such requires the most careful preparation for its intelligent rendition. Director Sedley Brown knows this, and has prepared for its production with unusual care. The rehearsals have been more than ample, and everything has been done to make the piece a success. Interest is added by the fact that on Monday night souvenirs will be given in commemoration of the 80th performance of the Woodward Stock company at the Burwood theater. On that night a beautiful program of Miss Lane will be given to each lady in attendance. "Sowing the Wind" will be presented each evening during the week and at matinees on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Among the list of musical comedies this season is "Down the Pike," in which Johnny and Emma Ray will appear at the Burwood for four days, commencing this afternoon. This offering is termed "a musical farce" and is designed for laughing purposes only. The central figure around which the fun revolves is the janitor of a modern apartment house, played by Mr. Ray. Among his tenants is a young man who is given to making the unfortunate husband engage a staff of pretty stenographers and his wife promptly engages a detective to watch him. In order to evade the detective, the husband disguises himself as the janitor and complications begin. There are intended for four days, commencing this afternoon. The offering is termed "a musical farce" and is designed for laughing purposes only. The central figure around which the fun revolves is the janitor of a modern apartment house, played by Mr. Ray. 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