SMALLEST STAR OF ALL

But What is Mere Size? Asks Mabel Taliaferro.

TALK WITH POLLY OF THE CIRCUS

Plays Don't Have to Be Written to Fit Her, Even if She Weighs Only Ninety-Six Pounds.

NEW YORK, April 4.—Mabel Taliferro, who is playing in "Polly of the Circus" at the Liberty theater, is the smallest star on the stage. She looks especially petite as she greets The Sun reporter at the door of her apartment, for she is holding an elephant in her arms. It is not a real elephant, perhaps it may be well to state, but one of china, a recently acquired mascot of her husband, of Luna Park fame, who has adopted the elephant as his crest.

The panels of the library are of elephant hide, the piano seat is set on the same pachyderm's four feet, there is an enormous elephant head on the wall and various bits of bric-a-brac are done in that special model. Mrs. Fred Thompson, as she is known in private life, looks especially well against the background elephantine, and if it had been selected as contrast it could not fulfill it mission more successfully.

Polly is only a bit over five feet in height and weighs at present ninety-six pounds, which, she says, is very normal. Only once in her life has she gone over the 100-pound mark, and then she tarried but a moment just to show what she could do.

As soon as people get well enough acquainted with her, so she says, they hum and haw and then out with some question as to just what the secret of her tiny waist and hips really is. One inquirer insisted upon knowing, as girl to girl, if the story that she wore long iron braces was a fact and if so, how they were fastened.

Meantime Mrs. Thompson goes on feeding, eating all sorts of sweets and starchy things, fairly reveling in malted milk and imbibing stout when she is troubled with insomnia.

"I don't want to get fat," she avers, "but certainly a few more pounds would not hurt me." The tiny bones of hands, arms and ankles seem absolutely to preclude the possibility of her ever succeeding in ousting the fat lady of Mr. Huber's museum from her well established position.

"It does seem hard, doesn't it," she asks, "when so many people really want to get thin that others are just as anxious to add a few inches to their statures and a few pounds to their weight?"

The difficulties of being the smallest star are not so many, it is learned, as might be fancied. The fact that one has to take her tiny frame into account in writing plays is only a legend of the press agent, for even the popular "Polly" was not written primarily with her in view.

During the ten years that Miss Taliaferro was under contract with Liebler Bros. it frequently happened that there was no play suitable for her, and at such times she simply waited and drew her salary. In contradistinction to this, many a time a play has been written in which it was unquestionably necessary that the leading, second or other important role should be played by a small woman.

This happened, for instance, when "The Land of Hearts' Desire" was used as a curtain raiser in the tour of Mrs. Le Moyne, Otis Skinner and Miss Elliston, who played "On a Balcony" in the principal cities a few years ago. The elf part in that fantasy nautrally suggested the little Taliaferro girl, as she was popularly known, and she played in it successfully. Lately when she was visiting at Mr. Yeats' home with her friend Lady Gregory of National Irish theater fame he expressed his pleasure at her performance and her physical suitability.

When "Pippa Passes" was put on for some special matinees Henry Miller selected her for the part of the little peasant girl, and the same thing occurred when "Lorna Doone" enjoyed a brief popularity. Her part of Esther in "The Children of the Ghetto" seemed to have been written with some idea of her limited size and in various other plays in which she has taken part, "The Price of Peace," "You Never Can Tell," etc., the same condition of having a part written with a petite woman in mind and then finding the woman has been the experience.

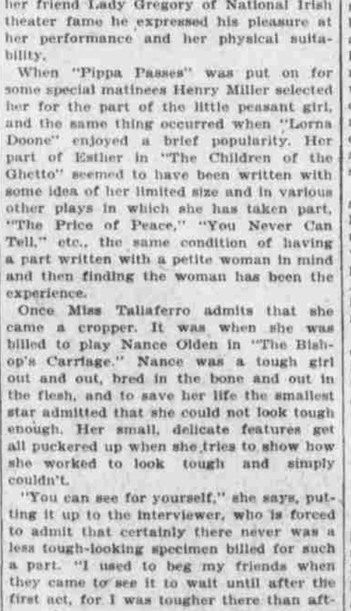
Once Miss Taliaferro admits that she came a cropper. It was when she was billed to play Nance Olden in "The Bishop's Carriage." Nance was a tough girl out and out, bred in the bone and out in the flesh, and to save her life the smallest star admitted that she could not look tough enough. Her small, delicate features get all puckered up when she tries to show how she worked to look tough and simply couldn't.

"You can see for yourself," she says, putting it up to the interviewer, who is forced to admit that certainly there never was a less tough-looking specimen billed for such a part. "I used to beg my friends when they came to see it to wait until after the first act, for I was tougher there than afterward, or was supposed to be. If they didn't see me then I thought they might be able to stand it. Oh, but I was bad! But not bad in the way I should have been to make a success; just dramatic school of acting bad, or something like that."

Miss Taliaferro has a gentle little vocabulark which just suits her. When she talks along and gets interested in her subject such words as sweet, nice, dear, love and amiable come as naturally to her phrasing as strenuous, suffragette or solar plexus to those of more heroic mould.

But do not be deceived by this for under the placid exterior of an unruffled countenance and the harmony of a kindly vocabulary she has mighty thoughts and stern purposes.

"It is perfectly absurd," isn't it, she



MISS TALIAFERRO DISCUSSES LITTLE

coos, "that any one should think that all the suffering and the tragedies and heart-rending experiences come to the large women, the tall, statuesque kind.

"I believe we all get our share of the development which comes with suffering, no matter what our physical stature may be. Oftentimes men and women are kinder and more gentle and thoughtful for the little woman, but fate isn't. Fate makes no such distinction, and so on the stage, which, after all, depicts the workings of circumstance, destiny, what you will, it may happen that a very small woman may carry a tragic part through successfully if she is only sure of herself and has the simple, sincere way of looking at her work.

"Th. moment that she becomes self-conscious, believes that she is in any way handicapped by her lack of inches or waist measure, that moment she fails to be convincing and to get, to use the stock expression, over the footlights. Maude Adams to my mind was just as successful in 'L'Aiglon' as Bernhardt was, but consider the difference in their appearance.

"You naturally think of Bernhardt as you do of Olga Nethersole, for example, as coming on the stage with great sweeping gestures, throwing her arms out from the shoulders in long expansive curves, big, tremendous in the expression of herself. If Maude Adams did that she would be absurd; the limited range of her gestures, the quiet stage manner, the delicate restraint, are fully as effective, and her personal following is proof of that."

Maude Adams is only one of the contemporary actresses whose work the smallest star speaks of admiringly. Although she has no intimate friends in the profession, keeping her stage and domestic life now, as she has always done, far apart, she is a mine of information in regard to methods and manners. To her all theatrical women are brave, and men fair. Not all, either, for she says frankly that she can't endure big men.

"They're so babyish, you know," she says from the superior height of her five feet some and her ninety-six pounds. "Absolutely babyish. They've got to be flattered and they throw away their money like geese, and they have all sorts of kittenish ideas. I can't endure small men, either," she confesses, "men with little bones in their wrists and queer little strutty ways of walking, and high silk hats to make people think they're taller than they really are."

For no apparent reason at this point of the interview Mrs. Thompson begins to speak of her husband and tells how, instead of having "Polly of the Circus" especially written so that he could furnish a medium for his wife and his inventive genius at the same time it was really Polly that brought them together and after a ten days' courtship—for Mr. Thompson was awfully busy at that time—made it seem the only thing possible for them to do to get married right away, so when the subject of Polly came up again they would be conveniently placed to talk it over.

Miss Magaret Mayo having written "Polly" and, thinking of Mabel Taliaferro as a possible heroine, read the play to her, and afterward she and Mr. Thompson discussed its possibilities and probabilities. Later on, after the material fixings were out of the road, they settled down to the idea of the circus lady in good earnest, and from their united efforts the play was evolved.

When the play was first put on a double represented the star in the bareback riding scene and consequent fall. Here is where one of the difficulties of being so small that one cannot easily find a counterpart came in. After a few nights the comments made in the orchestra and gallery were so audible that the scene was changed to a more artistic finish.

MABEL TALIAFERRO AS POLLY OF THE CIRCUS.
From Photo by Davis & Eickemeyer.

"Think of it," whispers Miss Taliaferro, "I actually head one horrid man say right out when the double came on: 'Why, those ain't her legs.' Isn't that ghastly? And I thought until then that they matched perfectly! That's when I commenced to take malted milk, but there was no appreciable effect, and not being able to change —er—them—well, we simply change the finale of the piece instead. It was a good deal easier."

To return to the fact of Miss Taliaferro's strength of character and purpose, she laughingly confesses that she has absolutely no ambitions to play Lady Macbeth.

Miss Taliferro is about 20, and says that her wide experience has taught her many lessons which she hopes to put into working use. She refers to her dramatic aims, discusses plays and says among other things:

"I do not object to the immoral play if it is written by a master hand—Shakespeare, for example, for I think he wrote one or two, although many do not. Bernard Shaw is all right for the library table, but not for the stage. He teaches you no great lesson, which is the only excuse for a risque play, I think."

Speaking of risque situations, she admits that her first engagement was made under circumstances which, unless a full explanation were given, might cause unpleasant comment. She was sitting on the knee of the author of the piece in which she made her debut when the offer was presented to her.

Joseph Arthur was the playwright and she was at that time 2½ years old. In a photograph of that time she is shown as a smiling young person holding her foot in her hand.

She had been playing with a niece of Mr. Arthur's that special day and Mr. Arthur had been listening to their baby talk. It suddenly occurred to him that her special brand of conversation was rather remarkably enunciated and he lifted her up and told her to say several things, among the rest, "There goes Santa Claus," and other lines of his piece, "Blue Jeans," in which she afterward took the part of Baby Banscombs, with a long page to be memorized.

At 2½ years most youngsters are still in the high chair stage, as likely as not strapped in, and their vocabulary is limited to a "Zing of vater" or something equally bromidian. Her training for her part was conducted on the plan that has succeeded well with horses, seals and fluffy kittens.

If she did well she got a present, anything on which she had set her childish heart, and the plan worked admirably. Her memory of the time is very clear, showing her precocious in that respect also.

"I remember it as if it were yesterday," she says, sitting forward on the edge of her chair and holding her knee with her enclosed arms. "All the rehearsals at home had gone along beautifully. I wasn't a bit afraid and remembered my lines all right.

"The one rehearsal I attended in the theater was the one before the final dress rehearsal. The curtain was down and the place was to me just like my room.

"I was successful there, too, and everybody was crazy over me. You know children were not very common on the stage at that time, which, of course, accounted for my popularity.

"At the dress rehearsal something terrible happened, something perfectly awful. For years I used to wake up with a nightmare in my baby mind at the recollection of it.

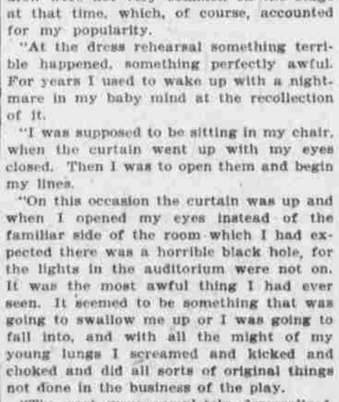
"I was supposed to be sitting in my chair, when the curtain went up with my eyes closed. Then I was to open them and begin my lines.

"On this occasion the curtain was up and when I opened my eyes instead of the familiar side of the room which I had expected there was a horrible black hole, for the lights in the auditorium were not on. It was the most awful thing I had ever seen. It seemed to be something that was going to swallow me up or I was going to fall into, and with all the might of my young lungs I screamed and kicked and choked and did all sorts of original things not done in the business of the play.

"The cast were completely demoralized. If I was going to act that way the whole piece would be a failure. Naturally they didn't know what to do, but they coaxed and pleaded with me and gave me presents and tried to make themselves believe that it wouldn't be quite so bad the night of the opening.

"When that came and I repeated my performance of opening my eyes, to my surprise and delight the awful black hole that had so terrified was no longer there. Instead I looked out on a world filled with the nicest, kindest faces, who all smiled at me, and I cooed and waved my hands and was just too pleased to see them for anything, and they laughed back at me and the members of the cast laughed, too, and the terrible ordeal was over and it wasn't until I grew older that I could make them realize what it was that had so frightened me.

"Before I was 6 years old I had played before more than 1,000,000 people in all the towns and cities of America and had traveled 15,000 miles. I learned to play Irish character parts with Chauncey Olcott and with Andrew Mack and Katie Emmett. I put on long dresses for the first time when I played Lovey Mary in 'Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch' and had to obtain permission from the Children's society before I could appear. Just a little time before my marriage I toured through the cities of Australia playing leads with Mr. Willie Collier in 'The Dictator' and 'On the Quiet.'



"How did you know that Mr. Thompson was writing a play all by himself in which perhaps I might appear?" asks the smallest star ingenuously, as if she had not been telling that all through the interview when she seemed to be talking of other things.

HUMAN SIDE OF NOTED FEUDIST

Newspaper Man Turns a Dangerous Trick and Escapes with Hide Whole.

The late Jim Hargis, king of Kentucky feudists, was, first of all, a vain man. He knew the extent of his power in the region, where law did not count until Floyd Byrd became prosecuting attorney, and it satisfied him. But his vanity had its limits. Hargis detested photographs and photographers. His enemies say that the reason was not a lack of vanity, but that the Breathitt king did not want his features too well known to the people and other sections of Kentucky. For years he had decreed at intervals that no one should ever take a photograph of him. During the feuds, several daring photographers who went to Jackson for the purpose of snapping the king were glad to escape with their lives. They did not return until the eve of the first trial of Jim Hargis for the Callahan murder. The judge knew of their presence and vowed that his rule would not be broken. Of course all the leading papers of Kentucky had photographers at Jackson, especially to get the picture of Jim Hargis. The Louisville Courier-Journal had sent a young man named Robert Hooe.

When the day came for the opening of the trial, the photographers were lined up along the main street from the store of Hargis to the court house. The accused waited in the rear of his store until the hour arrived for court to open, then covered his features with a quilt and made his way in that manner to the trial.

Several of the newspaper men thought that Hargis had won out and gave up the attempt for the time being. Hooe, however, went around to the rear of the court house and concealed himself near the entrance. His idea was that while Hargis was bound to be covered with his quilt if he left by the front entrance, he might discard it in leaving by the rear. This proved to be the case. When recess came Hargis, accompanied by some of his men, left by the rear way. The Courier-Journal man thereupon came out from his concealment and snapped the judge before he could hide behind one of his friends.

Hargis, in a rage, shook his fist and swore at the photographer. Several of his friends, knowing the rule of the judge, seized the Courier-Journal man and were about to smash his camera, when the judge interposed. "Don't, boys. His paper expects it of him, and I suppose he's got to make a living." The ice was broken. Hargis posed for several pictures and was never reluctant to be photographed afterward.—Harper's Weekly.

Too Fat for His Cell.

"Dan" Wadsworth, Hartford's heavy man, and said to be the fattest man in New England, is in jail, serving a sentence of sixty days. But Wadsworth is not in a cell, neither does he wear the regular jail uniform. The reasons are obvious. He weighs 419 pounds, and there is not a uniform in the jailer's outfit which he could get into. At present it is just possible for him to squeeze through a cell door, but the jailer realizes that in the quiet of a cell, with wholesome food and little exercise, Wadsworth's inclination to take on flesh would meet with unusually favorable conditions. And though he might be squeezed in, at the end of sixty days it is a question if he could be got out without pulling down the cell