

Gossip About Plays, Players and Playhouses

R. SOTHERN encountered during his engagement at the Boyd theater the same difficulty that must be met by all actors who undertake to present themselves in classic roles. This is the opposition of pre-determined notions of how the part should be presented, more or less firmly fixed in the minds of all who witness the performance. Especially in this case of "Hamlet." So many great actors have presented this part with such widely varying illustration, especially of the details, and so many commentators have dwelt upon it at length and written into it much that does not appear on the surface and a great deal that seems unwarranted, that the student of the drama hesitates in confusion amidst the multitude of embodiments that have been given them. This, in effect, has reduced "Hamlet" to the condition of a drama for the library rather than for the stage, and whenever Mr. Sothern, or any other great actor, essays the role he is merely pitting his personal judgment against that of a majority, at least, of those who witness it. It is quite likely that within certain salutary bounds "Hamlet" is capable of uniform presentation, but the general development of the character depends to so large an extent on the temperament and mental bent of the actor, that such succeeding performance must necessarily amount almost to a new conception of the role.

No one realizes this difficulty more fully than does Mr. Sothern and he says, himself, that he has seldom played the part twice alike. In such instances as to continue to shift and he is left perpetually in doubt as to just what expression should be given to its varying phases. So, if he attains to any degree of success in the role, it is because of his personality. Mr. Sothern's efforts have been made in the direction of developing a natural Hamlet—one whose perplexity of mind can be in some measure grasped by the ordinary observer, devoid of subtlety, and without proceeding to any extreme in dramatic analysis. In this respect the creation is somewhat unique and is altogether to the credit of the actor. It is this grace of sound common sense that has saved Mr. Sothern from mistakes that one whose mind was less soundly developed might easily fall into. If his Hamlet lacks in profundity, it gains because it is Hamlet that can be understood. For this much, thanks are due to Mr. Sothern.

His Richelieu is cast on more formal lines. He seldom departs from the traditions of the part, probably in this regard compensating for his abandonment of the traditions that surround the major role. He creates the great French minister as an scholarly, dignified and patriotic old gentleman, beneath whose hard surface of worldly wisdom and statecraft runs a current of warm sympathy for those about him, and a deep and abiding love for those who are close to him. This has always been the accepted view of the character as embodied in the Halford Letton drama, and in preserving it, the actor has merely bowed to the canons of his craft. He is not to be censured for this, for in other ways he has undertaken enough that is new to keep him busy and he will be easily excused for the conventionality of his Richelieu.

Lord Dundreary is merely a survival rather than a revival. No other actor on the American stage would undertake the part for obvious reasons. Yet it is peculiarly fitting that the son of the man whose name is so familiar because of the hold the part took on the public should again bring to visual attention the eccentricities and foibles of the quaint conceit that made old fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers laugh so many years ago. The role has no extrinsic value whatever, depending entirely on itself and its creator for any interest that may flow from it. The play, "Our American Cousin," is of interest merely as showing what sort of stuff could get on the stage fifty years ago and be accepted. In adding this to his repertoire, Mr. Sothern is moved by a desire to prevent himself from deserting along narrow lines. His natural gift of expression is more for comedy than for the serious work of the drama, and yet he has turned himself aside both from the light comedy, in which he first became prominent, and from the romantic, in which he gained even greater prominence, and undertaken the heavy work of the classic. He did this after mature deliberation, proving himself to be a studious and scholarly actor, as well as ambitious, but with the experience of many who have gone before to guide him he has wisely determined that his development should not be solely in the direction of the classic, but has determined to keep himself in touch with the lighter phases of the stage so that his work will appeal to a more numerous public. The contrast between Hamlet and Dundreary, for example, is so sharp and in some ways harsh one. The two parts seem to be almost at opposite poles and yet the effort is justified.

Grace George has again secured a new play—Mr. Thompson Buchanan's "A Woman's Way." This comedy is described as being "Divorconia" the other way round. In it is the wife who is given provocation for divorce, but who wins back her husband by a little tact. The subterfuge adopted is not a novel one, but its working out presents elements of comedy that prove greatly successful. When the wife discovers that her husband has been compromised in connection with a widow and divorce is suggested she proves herself more resourceful, and instead of hurrying away to her lawyer she consults her chef. A dinner party is arranged to which are invited the widow and the several men with whom she has been flirting, and during the progress of the meal the husband is given an excellent chance to find out just where he stands with the widow, how shallow her pretensions are and how inferior she is to his wife. Before the meal is closed he is ready to confess his error and renew his allegiance. The current of the play turns on the battle of wits between the two women. Miss George playing the part of the wife and Dorothy Tennant the part of the widow. The New York critics raise their voices for one in a single chorus of praise, not only for the drama, but for the stars and her associates. The play is the work of a member of the reportorial staff of the New York American.

THREE STARS FROM ABOARD

Now Getting Ready to Play in English.

NEW YORK, March 6.—Theatrical managers are imitative, and maybe for that reason there is to be a fresh supply of foreign actresses for the American stage. The success of Alla Nazimova and Bertha Kalich may explain the present industry of Marietta Oily, Hedwig Reicher and Mimi Aguglia in acquiring the English language. The three are next year to be put forward as stars in the vernacular.

Or there may be another reason why these recruits from the foreign stage have been brought into the field of the American sisterhood. Managers believe that stars

are necessary to the success of a play. They hesitate to send out from New York plays without a woman star at the head of the company, and even here they prefer to supply this element of attraction to all their productions.

The public will take to an unknown personality more eagerly than it will to a play that may not be known. While the play is in reality more important than the actor or the actress the presence of a star at the head of a company helps greatly. Ensemble, for instance, as represented by a stock company, has no drawing power of its own to help out the play, whereas Miss Blanche Eryxe will increase the interest of the public in the play in which she is the star, or the near star.

This theory is as everywhere acquainted with the theater has known for several years, is responsible for the presence of the many fair incompetents at the heads of various companies traveling through the country and for the many tall young men with broad shoulders and good profiles who have suddenly become stars because there is supposed to be in their personality something that appeals to the taste of the public.

Personally—that is the overworked substantially—that explains the making of many stars. Have all the types of American personality been exhausted in the search for some new type, some new personality some-thing that appeals to the taste of the public?

Signora Aguglia came into notice first last autumn in London with the company of Sicilian players who were afterward imported for the entertainment of New Yorkers by Charles Frohman. She moved on to Berlin in the interval, and her success in the peculiarly intense style of act-

ing that she represents was as great there as in London.

The plays she has acted in here are not of a character to stand transfer to the American stage and her promised appearance as Zaza is evidence of this and work into which Mr. Frohman may put her. She is by no means the unskilled peasant actress that some critics have come to believe or at all events to proclaim.

She has never appeared perhaps on the most conspicuous stages of the continental theater, but that is the reflection of her natural ability. Her father was an actor and her mother had been an amateur in Catania, where Mimi Aguglia was born. She began to act at the age of 5 and in this particular her life was not unlike that of her greater contemporary, Eleonora Duse, who traveled about for years as a child with her father's modest company.

She played children's parts until she was 12, then began to pine under the strain of her dramatic efforts and took to singing couplets in a music hall where her father put her to avoid the strain of traveling and acting in the humble manner he and her mother and their colleagues were compelled to do. At 17 she joined Signor Ferraro's company of Sicilian actors and three days later played the same part in "Malia" that introduced her to New York audiences.

BAD SIDE OF THE ACTOR'S JOB

Much Unpaid For Work and Many Minor Expenses.

NEW YORK, March 6.—In a newly imported musical comedy the chief comedians soliloquize for a time on the advantages of a stage career and concludes:

"I've always thought I'd like to be an actor, but it must cut in on one's evenings frightfully."

"That isn't the only disadvantage. Take the question of rehearsal and go the round of half a dozen actors of the mediocre but necessary kind and listen to the hard luck stories. Any show means at least three weeks of rehearsal—in most cases very much more.

For these weeks there is no pay and it may be that after the four or six or eight weeks of unpaid work the production will fall in a week, fall perhaps if the manager is unfortunally, without salaries for even that week being forthcoming.

This fate doesn't always affect only the actors of lesser class. One of the best known of American character actors, a man who has had prominent parts in a number of successful stage productions, an entire winter in unpaid rehearsal some two or three years ago. He appeared in four successive productions, each elaborate, but each destined to a run of not more than two weeks. If his salary were \$100 a week, he could not have earned much more than \$400 or \$500 for that season's work—and there are fifty-two weeks of board to be paid in the actor's year, and all in that of the humble person who pay \$2 to watch him.

Another young English actor who came to this country some years ago rehearsed in one season some fourteen weeks with three plays, each of which was a complete failure. He got something like three weeks pay for this winter. In addition he had the extra good luck to see a play in his own, in which, however, he did not appear, open in Monday and close in Wednesday of the same week.

In fact an actor getting say, \$50 a week, which seems a good salary to the clerk at \$2 a week, counts himself very lucky if he works forty weeks a year. Indeed if he works thirty he is well off and the \$50 survives when it is spread over a year.

Clothes are another problem. The general custom of the business is that the manager shall provide only costumes; that is, anything that is not modern dress.

Suppose a production calls, as is not uncommon, for a business suit, a frock coat and a suit of evening clothes. All or part of these may have to be purchased new for shabbiness is a cardinal offence. In one musical play produced not long ago the juvenile is called on to appear in the first act in a suit of white flannels, useful garments for a sometimes needy actor. Nevertheless they're not costumes and he must buy them himself.

COMING TO THE OMAHA THEATERS

What the Press Agent Promises to the Public.

The only changes which have been made in "A Knight for a Day" since it was last seen at the Boyd are likely to prove decidedly for the better. Eugene Moulan has succeeded Bobby Berry as Jonathan Joy, the nifty waiter, who masquerades as a nobleman, and Renold Cameron has as Mr. Moulans' old part of Marcelino, the inventor of the meat sauce which figures prominently in the merry play. Elsie Herbert, Gertrude Hutcheson, Eleanor Irving, Estelle Winlock and that American beauty chorus are still prominent in what has been declared to be one of the best musical comedies of recent years. It will return to the Boyd this evening for two performances, the engagement closing Monday night.

"Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," a play which may be said to be a fit example of the simple life, lived humorously, comes to the Boyd Tuesday, Wednesday and Wednesday matinee and will be presented by a special cast direct from a most successful Australian engagement. It has been said that "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch" is a play

is born and then arrange to have the child adopted, and so be quit of both. Still further it shows the governess, a woman of resource, and that she sends for a parson, and, at the point of her pistol, the town clerk, and the mayor her part second displays her as a school teacher at Shiloh with those precocious children whose presence inspires a feeling of respect for the memory of good old papa and he presents Townsend as a New York politician of the first order, of course, and incidentally it delineates, at an excellent length, the impenetrable prospect of matrimony, so way connected with the preceding. What the play is about is Eleanor Irving, who is married to the town clerk, and almost interminable talk, unless "Thelma and Townsend" in the implicit prospect of matrimony, a gifted child. In short, the fabric is different, but the comedy is the same, sedition, propagation, teaching, reverence and heroic bias. Miss Aguglia, indulging herself freely in her own soliloquy and acting, bearing the burden of maternity, but beyond that the world is the world, and the world is the world. Mr. Howard Kyle, a professional achievement in the future. The attempt at acting made by Mr. Milton Hill is abortive and afflicting. Mr. Howard Kyle, a professional achievement in the future. The attempt at acting made by Mr. Milton Hill is abortive and afflicting. Mr. Howard Kyle, a professional achievement in the future. The attempt at acting made by Mr. Milton Hill is abortive and afflicting.

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