

Enter-Successful Playwrights--a Prof. and a Critic

By BURNS MANTLE. NEW YORK--(Special Correspondence)--The professors of the drama seldom write plays. Or, if they do, their plays do not often reach production in the commercial theater. Or in the subsidized art theater either, for that matter. Possibly because, being learned, they lack a common touch with the crowd and those into whose hands the crowd is seemingly content to place its trust in the matter of supplying its theatrical entertainment. Or, because, having experimented they have found the experience bitter and give up hope.

Playwriting is a discouraging business, even under the best of encouragement. And play-selling is worse. We cannot easily picture George Pierce Baker of Harvard, for instance, peddling along Broadway a play in which he has confidence, trying to convince the average New York manager, that it is a good play and will surely act. Or William Lyon Phelps, or William Norman Guthrie.

Brander Matthews, when he was a younger man and before his enthusiasms cooled, had a fling at playwriting, and met with some success. In our time William Vaughn Moody of Chicago university, thanks to the persistence of Margaret Anglin, who believed in him, produced a success in "The Great Divide," and a quasi-success in "The Faith Healer" at Hamilton, now of the movies but late of Columbia university, working with A. E. Thomas as a collaborator, has written several plays.

Critics of the drama have been little more successful as playwrights. Franklin Eyles, a year ago, had several plays to his credit, the best of them written with a collaborator, however. Nym Crinkle was part author of "The Still Alarm." Channing Pollock became a successful dramatist after serving time in the critical chain gang. He did "Victor Mapes," Paul Willstach, Charles Frederick Nirdlinger, John McNally and Earl Derr Biggers. But only Mapes and Pollock have kept at it with anything resembling consistent success.

The critic, as a professional analyst of play soon becomes so conscious of the shortcomings of his own work that he is easily discouraged, even when he possesses a talent for this most difficult of all forms of literary expression.

Which adds interest to the fact that one critic and one professor of the drama were produced as plays successfully. William Archer's "Green Goddess" has been voted the most interesting melodrama of the year, and Mr. Archer was long the respected dean of London's dramatic critics. And Prof. Hatcher Hughes, who lectured on the drama at Columbia, appeared as part author of "Wake Up, Jonathan," which is Mrs. Fiske's new play.

"The Green Goddess" was the greatest surprise of the two; both because it is the better play and because it was not reasonably to be expected that the author of a work called "Playmaking," in which the sets laws of dramaturgy are carefully written down, could so easily adjust himself to the task of writing a play in the popular melodramatic form.

It might be a perfect play constructurally, we agreed, but it would prove pretty dull entertainment. What did an authority on the drama, and the best known of the Ibsen translators, know about melodrama? What sympathy would he have with the reactions of the crowd that approves melodrama, and the approval of which is necessary to its success?

But Mr. Archer fooled us. He set out to write a good show, rather than a perfect play. His story is that of an English aviator, an amateur, who undertakes to pilot an English major and his wife across the Himalayas and comes to grief in the kingdom of Rukh, when his airplane smashes against a mountain top in a fog, the particular mountain top on which the shrine of the Green Goddess has been erected.

The natives of Rukh are a semi-barbarous group of fanatics, ruled over by a raja, who has been educated at Cambridge and returned to his native country with hatred of the "lords of creation" in his heart and upon them the indignities they have put upon their Asiatic wards. At the moment of his unwilling visitors' arrival he is particularly bitter because he has just heard that in London his three half-brothers are about to be executed for having committed an atrocious murder. This is his chance to be revenged. At the very hour his brothers are to be hanged in London, he will turn his hostages over to the natives that their extermination may serve to square the account. On second thought, he will save the life of the lady if she will agree to join his family and become the mother of a future ruler of Rukh.

An Artfully and convincingly, the suspense is sustained. The Englishmen attempt to escape by commandeering the wireless and throwing the raja's operator out of a castle window on to the rocks just before, but they are frustrated, and the lady's husband is killed. (Which helps to clear the plot, because he is a cruel husband and she is in love with the aviator.) Finally the arrangements for the death of the remaining two are mysteriously carried out, with all the thrills of the torture chamber added, and then, at the psychological moment, help arrives and everybody is reasonably happy.

A fascinating melodrama, made doubly interesting by the art of George Arliss, cast as the suave and velvet-gloved raja--the best part he has had since "Disraeli," and the beautifully complete and pictorially effective production given the play by Winthrop Goddard, Oliver Wyndham and Cyril Keightley are in the cast, and Ivan Simpson gives a fine performance as the wireless man, a servile English valet and a fugitive from justice.

Professor Hughes' play, "Wake Up, Jonathan," in the final preparation of which he had the assistance of Elmer Rice, who wrote "On Trial," is an amusing satirical comedy in which the familiar protagonist of the modern drama, the captain of industry who neglects his wife during the accumulation of a fortune, is made a comic figure; a "poor boob" unable to understand,



CATHERINE MULQUEEN AS 'IRENE' AT THE BRANDEIS

Why women, who confessedly admire "strong" men, prefer to be loved by the gentler, more considerate, more idealistic representatives of the male sex. This chap deliberately deserts his family for 10 years, and then comes home thinking to re-establish himself in their affections by boasting of his \$100,000,000 fortune and his success as a Napoleon of trade. He finds his children cold and his wife of a mind to accept him as a joke.

What the Theaters Offer

TONIGHT will witness the opening performance of the best of the modern comedy world, "Irene," which the Vanderbilt Producing Co. will present at the Brandeis theater for an engagement of four nights and Wednesday matinee. "Irene" is a romance of a New York shop girl, who is chosen to display the smart gowns created by a dressmaker near to the ultra-fashionable set. Joseph M. Carthy, who is responsible for the lyrics has written a number of catchy songs each one to fit the situation and story. Every member of the company is seen in the presentation of the brandeis, served apprenticeship with the New York company before they were given a contract for the present tour, to make sure that they were fitted for the part. The title role is entrusted to Katherine Mulqueen, whose performance of the role is said to be ideal. Amelia Bence, Annie Hart, Nina Penn, Beatrice O'Connor, Harriet Young, Grace LaSalle, Olga Tompsett, Booth Howard, Garrett Carroll, Eugene MacGregor, Austin Clarke, George Eisinger, James Curran and a sprightly well-trained chorus. The production of "Irene" is an exact replica of that seen in New York during its long run, and each and every scene and costume being duplicated. The musical score will have the advantage of being interpreted by an orchestra of 25.

WHEN the Selwyns present "Buddies" at the Brandeis theater next Friday and Saturday, February 4 and 5, with matinee Saturday, theatergoers will have an opportunity of seeing what is said to be the smartest comedy and bearing the most hitting music which New York produced last season. This comedy, by Rupert Hughes, with lyrics and music by R. C. Hilliam. The locale is a comedy of pictures, and the story, and it is said that the Selwyns have taken full advantage of the opportunity to provide an elaborate scenic inventory of the specially selected cast. The cast includes Jean DeLoach, Moore, James Marshall, Maurice Clarke, Lane and Ray, Shirley Love, "Pat" Palmer, Hedley Hall, Edward Mervin, G. L. White, Harry Stanley, "Carmen" Pank, S. Edward Ortega, Joseph H. Baird, Ann Ross and Louise Clarke.

"THE JUNIOR PARTNER," a one-act comedy by Rupert Hughes, is to be presented at the Orpheum this week with William Gaxton in the chief role. "Buddies" and "Junior Partner" are combined in this sketch. The star is supported by a company of capable players. Headline honors will be shared with the Cameron Sisters, whose critics extol as being dancers of unusual type. The bill is to have two featured acts, one presented by Ole Olson and his Johnnie, while the other is to be the new group, who offer by Harriet and Marie McConnell. Jack La Vier is an equilibrist and an entertaining funny man, and a successful feature. Page and Green are eccentric funsters who do their comedy in pantomime. They are eccentric funsters in the musical act of Petty Reat and Bro. and the instruction of a series of bits, which, when struck by mallets, give out a great variety of musical tones. Topics of the Day will be a screen feature that displays the fun of the newspaper paragraphs. Monograms will picture new events.

THE New York Winter Garden "Fading Show" returns to Omaha on its east from California. The engagement is for four days, starting Thursday, March 2.

MARY'S First Dressing Room. Mary Pickford's first dressing room is still intact at the old Biograph building in New York. It was specially constructed for her and is a two-room cottage just outside the studio where Mary's first starting pictures were made. It is now used for storing paints.

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Maurice Clarke Says He Was Bashful When He Lived in Omaha

While playing in New Orleans recently, Maurice Clark, an Omaha boy, who is the leading comedian in the Selwyns' musical play, "Buddies," which will be seen at the Brandeis theater next Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening, was interviewed by a special writer on the Times-Picayune of that city. During the interview the writer said: "In watching your performance, one forgets that you are acting the exorbitantly shy 'Babe.' A lady sitting next to me said to her companion, 'I'll bet he is every bit as bashful off the stage.'" "Well, to be truthful," volunteered Mr. Clark, "as a small boy I was about as bashful before the fair sex as 'Babe' is when he is supposed to propose to 'Julie.' My parents sent me to Miss Lillian Fitch in the old Boyd theater for instruction in elocution--thinking to cure me of this weakness."

"Way Down East" a Mint There are said to be 13 prints of "Way Down East" working night and day in this country for the profit of David Wark Griffith and his backers. It is also said that it is a poor financial week when the total receipts are not around the \$190,000 mark.

Guess His Eighth Ambition Was to Swallow Cyanide

Buster Keaton, Metro comedy star, published recently a list of his seven boyhood ambitions. They were: To break milk bottle over nurse's head. To play with T. N. T. and custard pies. To be "cut-up" in school. To get a job as an "extra" in a studio and have all the breakaways fall on him.

TID-BITS OF 1920" a miniature singing, dancing and musical revue, the newest and latest production of Will J. Harris, comes as the stellar act of the new show opening at the Empress today. Features in the act are Sylvia Snow, Dan A. Sigworth, singing and dancing; musical comedy; violinist and dancing; musical comedy; international reputation. Featured on the bill are the Stratford Comedy Four, who present "School Frolics," which consists of harmonious singing, real stunts, stunts and situations. Horace Lockwood and Felix Rush, will appear in "Two Old Bats," the story of its kind, "Sunshine," is to be presented by La Rose and the Empress, up to the minute patter and modern dancing promise entertainment and enjoyment.

VAUDEVILLE'S delightful character act, Harriet McConnell, is contributing one of the stellar attractions at the Orpheum next week. She shares the headline position with Miss DeLoach, who is a popular artist, and offers from such grand operas as "Tales of Hoffmann," "Pagliacci," "La Traviata," "Carmen," "Pausanias." No comedian on the vaudeville stage produces heartier laughter than Tom Smith, who will be recalled as one of the funniest team known as Smith and Austin.

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three encores, I was transported to the ethereal area. "My fate was sealed. I must be some kind of an orator--perhaps a lawyer or a politician. I had always a great love for the theater. Almost every night found me leaning over the highest rail in the old Boyd theater.

"One night I heard some actors rehearsing in a hall of the theater. I tip-toed up to the door and listened with awe. One of the girls, who knew I was a pupil of Miss Fitch's, spied me and dragged me into the room. The director thrust a part into my hands. It was 'Thisbe' in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Well, that was all there was to it. The play was the thing. I had to be an actor.

"As to whether or not my parents cured me of my bashfulness, is hard to say. I have no doubt if I ever get into 'Babe's' predicament my old malady will come back to me."

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