A Revival of Peter the Great

Irving's Production In London.

The Growing Importance of History In Dramatic Art.

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"Peter the Great" is the topic of the day. After the Lincoln, the Napoleon, the Washington craze and fade, there is a strong probability that we shall have a Peter the Great revival in both literature and dramatic art. There was enough of the sensational in his career to furnish materials for dozens of books and situations so intensely vivid that a score of pipe-dipping pens may be employed for years to come.

Mr. Laurence Irving has written and is now playing with his father, Sir Henry Irving, at the Lyceum theater, in London, a sketch dealing with the side-light of the progressive barbarian. At least, the English critics declare that it is not a play, but a series of episodes, dramatic enough in themselves, but not of sufficient coherence to be called a drama. But Irving's representation of the imperial character is said to be a wonderful delineation of histrionic art. His presentation of Peter is the man as he may have been—brutal and cruel, yet of an unexpected kindness of heart; tyrant and carouser on the surface, yet imbued with a devotion to his Russia that amounts to fanaticism; a man driven blindly hither and thither, the very creature of circumstance, yet ever dominated by an inflexible will and the stern purpose to make all conquered even accepting himself and his blood—unloyal to his country; a depot of the fondest type and a patriot of the purest flame; more than half a madman and, at times, little less than divine. This handle of irreconcilables speaker makes a living, breathing creature—"in whom we now have faith and for whom we have pity."

There are some anachronisms of language in the play, such as Peter talking about "Christmas presents," and some very crudely outlined bits making. The scenario, as the dramatists would say, is simple. Alexis is a weak, shifty, stubborn visionary, a puppet in the hands of those who desire to have Russia once more in the grasp of a bigoted and ignorant church. He is "taken in" by every one about him; even his mistress, Euphrosine, deceives him in the most blatant fashion. This weakling Peter wishes to make into a man fit to be his successor (though he seems obliged to declare Catherine as such and had he publicly crowned a few months before his death), to carry on the great work and realize dreams of his life—the regeneration and enlightenment of Russia. Thwarted by the vacillating nature of Alexis and the plots of his advisers, Peter demands that he should make his choice—a monastery or work. He chooses the worldlier life, but flies to Italy with euphemistic Euphrosine. Persuaded into returning, Alexis is tried for treason and, after a sham trial, is condemned to forfeit his life.

It may be well to state here that the accompanying illustration of Tamberlik shows how the famous actor "made up" for the part (or rather about 50 years ago, when he played the initial role in Jullien's not very successful opera in London).

Now, to review some of the stage details of the monarch's life. He was born near Moscow June 10, 1672, and died in St. Petersburg Feb. 8, 1725. His father, Alexis, died in 1676 and was succeeded by Feodor, who lived but six years longer, dying without issue, but nominating as his successor, to the exclusion of Ivan, the czar's elder half brother, who was an imbecile youth.

An insurrection fomented by their sister Sophia immediately followed. The bitter struggle was settled after much bloodshed by the joint coronation of Ivan and Peter, in May, 1682, with Sophia as regent.

In July, after marrying Eudoxia Feodorovna Lapukhin, contrary to the remonstrances of Peter, strong out of the realm of mastery to which Sophia's adherents had consigned him and, accused principally by the Swiss Lefort and the Scotchman Gordon, assumed the control of affairs. He imprisoned his sister in a convent, where she ended her life in 1704, and banished Prince Galitzine, her minister. Ivan voluntarily withdrew, and Peter thus became virtually sole sovereign. The former's death occurred in 1696.

Peter at once organized a new army, entered the ranks himself and rose through every grade. This example he required his nobles to follow.

Then followed in rapid succession the dramatic incidents of his life—learning seamanship by cruising on board Dutch and English ships at Archangel; besieging and taking, in 1696, the Turkish city of Azof, on the sea of the same name; repudiating his wife because she opposed his plans, working at Zaandam incognito as a shipbuilder, studying every known scientific branch; visiting Sweden and Vienna, quelling an insurrection in his empire with savage cruelty, and then fighting the disastrous battle of Narva. He altered the calendar, making the year begin with Jan. 1, instead of Sept. 1, and instituted the order of St. Andrew as the patron saint of Russia. He regulated the press, built defensive works in his capital, was instructor, friend, prosecutor, workman, emperor and tyrant, all in one.

In company with the Empress Catherine, his wife, formerly his mistress, he made a second tour of Europe in 1716 and was received at Paris in great splendor. These then occurred that noted interview between him and Mme. Montenon.

His son Alexis, the child of his first marriage, evincing a treasonable spirit, was tried and condemned to death. A few days later (July 7, 1718) he died in prison under highly suspicious circumstances.

This latter event is the motif of the third act of Irving's play. In this Alexis and Euphrosine are discovered by Tolstoi in their hiding place near Naples and induced to return to Russia. Peter since the death warrant, and Alexis goes to his death, not, however, without fully realizing the greatness of his father's purpose. This purpose is made plain by Mr. Irving.

What follows is justified by the czar's logic: "Emperors don't have sons; they have successors. I live for men; that is enough for me."

The drama marches on to its tragic close. But the soliloquy of the father is one of the strongest efforts of the stage.

"Never a man had his heart wrenched up in a vise like me. All their hands are on the long handle—all their hands are on it—turning and forcing it. The last drops of blood and the last chips of flesh seem to have oozed out of it. They can take their hands from the handle, their work is done; the two iron sides have come together—or, no, not quite together—the shrivelled skin of what was once a joyful human heart still just keeps them from touching. * * * Son, I begin to understand it now; I hear the trumpets sounding in my heart. I am for light and love. You are against it. You only see the mutilation and the cruel surgery. I see God's light brought back to the darkened eye and vitality restored to the stagnant blood. And yet—no, you are not against me; you are with me! For light and love—your own words have laid me low. Therefore, as you are with me in the wish, but cannot follow me in the means—thenceforth my way to save us both—I sign! Oh, my son Alexis! Oh, Alexis, my son—my son!"

Miss Ellen Terry, who enacts Catherine, is a rough diamond, low born and boisterous, a soldier's mistress, carrying little for public opinion, coarse in her humor, but with the sympathetic heart that redeems the character from caitiffery. Of the three Americans in the cast, Robert Taber has the thankless one of Alexis, which he makes endurable to Mr. Irving. Miss Ethel Barrymore undertakes the part of Euphrosine, which the English do not praise, and Eudoxia is pathetically played by Miss Hackman. Mr. Macintosh, a careful actor, offers a finished rendering of Count Tolstoi, the czar's creature, a great part. Mr. Hamilton is best remembered as the successor of the late Frank Mayo in the title role of "Paddin' head Wilson."

The largest collection of dramatic literature and playbills ever sold will be auctioned off at Boston next spring. The collection includes 3,000 books relating to the stage, 2,500 autograph letters, 200,000 playbills and 1,000 prints and photographs of actors, besides programmes, all paintings and odds and ends of curious theatrical memorabilia. Dramatic authorities are already on the alert and awaiting the opening of the sale.

Colonel Mason, business manager for "Christopher, Jr.," in the corner of a unique gallery to-day used in the theater at St. Thomas, Ont. On one side of the green easeboard is a picture of Tribe and Little Bobbie making love and on the reverse side a picture of Swengali, beneath which is the inscription, "God's tickle!"

Out in Australia the Right Hon. the Earl of Rudyerbury, Baron Cooper of Fashed and a baronet, has been making a success in comic opera. His bedside has a tenor voice which is well trained and is said to be full of feeling, but hardly strong enough to fill an opera house. His first venture in Australia was sold-to-camp to my Lord Tom Beasley, who is governor there, but soon tired of that sort of life and went upon the operatic stage. He made his first appearance in the role of a ballet dancer.

The Rogers brothers and Maud Raymond will hold a comedy company next season.

It is announced that when Julia Arthur returns to New York on April 25 she will present a new version of "Camille." She has decided to give during the time occupied by the new three act Italian comedy, "Imbecile," by Roberto Bracco, which she has had translated into English.

The Stage In Gotham.

Disastrous Season on the Road.

Arthur Crispin's Breezy Comments on Theatrical Affairs.

New York, Feb. 3.—This has certainly been a great year for those of our actors who have gone to the other side to try their luck. Only a short time ago the cable informed us of the really great hit scored by Robert Taber in Henry Irving's production of "Peter the Great" and the less emphatic though none the less genuine success achieved by two young American girls in the same play. And now comes the news that in "Trelawney of the Wells," the Pinero comedy which has been pronounced the equal of anything that talented author has ever written, the hits were made by two American actors, Paul Arthur and Aubrey Boucicault. It may be asserted that the latter is not an American, and if his nativity alone is to be considered that would be true, but Boucicault learned all he knows about acting in this country. His methods are as distinctly American as those of any performer we have, and it was for that very reason that many of his friends here feared the outcome of his London experiment. As to Paul Arthur, since he went to the other side he has never had a setback, and he is speedily becoming one of the most popular "leading juveniles" in the British metropolis.

If this sort of thing continues, it will not be long before the old order of things will be reversed and the Englishmen will be sending to the United States to get the players for their leading roles.

"Trelawney of the Wells," I understand, has already been secured for this country by a prominent theatrical promoter, and if it lives up to all the kind things said of it it will be produced in this city about the 1st of April. In that event an effort will be made to secure the release of Messrs. Arthur and Boucicault, who will be offered the parts in the New York representation which they created in London.

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The newspapers are publishing as though it were brand new the statement that Pia Dean will probably appear at the head of a company next season under the management of her sister, May Irwin. In reality there is nothing new about this, as it has been contemplated for some time. The idea was that Pia could use in the territory not covered by her sister the plays in which the latter had scored successes. As both women are prominent enough to make a strong appeal to the public, the scheme seems to give more than the usual promise of success.

If it is true that Pia has been a star during the present season, that her tour was planned by the same firm which had charge of the affairs of May, and that despite all that she is generally believed not to have made a fortune for her managers. But, after all, that is not surprising, any more than that Maria Dressler was not received throughout the country with wild enthusiasm. Pia Irwin appeared in one of her sister's old "stand offs," "The Widow Jones," while Miss Dressler made use of another, "Courted into Court." Neither of these plays was a great work of art in the first place, and they won success only through the aggressive personality of May Irwin. It is hardly possible that either of the other ladies named have done the something with them if they had had the first chance, but after May Irwin had squeezed them both dry it was foolish to suppose that any one else could get anything out of them. If, however, immediately after May shall have struck a winner on Broadway, her sister should be sent out over the territory which she does not want, there would be a very strong probability of success, with the ultimate result that Miss Pia would in time work up as good a clientele for herself as May now has. The same would probably be true of Miss Dressler, for she is the equal of either of the others as a laugh producer.

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Gladys Wallis, the charmingly petite young woman who first came prominently into notice as a member of W. H. Crane's company, is to go into comic opera. She has some voice and as delightful a personality as any woman on the stage. She is therefore equipped with the two prime essentials for light opera. Miss Wallis was at one time thought to be destined for successful starhood, and it is probable that she was, although she has so far been kept out of it by a combination of circumstances over which her friends say she had no control and for which her disparagers declare that she was herself responsible. Some time after she left Crane she was engaged by John W. Dunne to take the place of his wife, Patti Rosa, who had died suddenly. Patti Rosa was popularly supposed to have made a great deal of money, and she was therefore confidently predicted that when her place was taken by a woman so much handsomer and so much more talented than she was Dunne's coffers would be speedily filled to overflowing. But, as the old saw goes, "the best laid plans of mice and men go astray." Dunne had not been the case with Miss Wallis' starring venture. The company was doing very well when Gilbertine began, and before long the tour was closed.

Miss Wallis' work as the little girl in "The Empire of Dames" was so delightful a bit as has been seen in this city for many years, and most persons who are "in the know" think that Manager Al Cadoz made no mistake in securing her for an important role in "The Foxy Quiller." Who knows but that it may prove to be the beginning from which Miss Wallis will rise into the empyrean of comic opera stars? Much stranger things have happened only recently in the theatrical world.

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It is pretty generally agreed that while the present season has been a good one for the managers of this city generally, it has so far been the worst on record "on the road." In one week recently there were no less than 14 companies which returned to New York to "recuperate," which is the euphemism to close. Stars who have always been supposed to have a strong following throughout the country have played to miserable audiences in many of the cities in which they expected to make a great deal of money, while in the "bad" towns, as an actor expressed it to me the other day, "there are adjectives in the English language strong enough to describe the attendance we have not had." With the really important attractions things have not been quite so bad, but even they have not done more than half as well as was expected.

The reason?

Every man you meet in the theatrical district along Broadway has a theory, and every one of the theories is different. Some say times are not good enough, while others declare that times are so good that the people are busy saving up against another period of depression. One man will aver that the little repertory companies are playing into with the show business, while his friend will confide to you that that is an absurd idea and that if we had more of these repertory companies there would be fewer actors out of work, and the stage would, therefore, be the gainer. But, no matter what the cause, the fact exists, and there are very few managers who have the temerity to claim that their attractions have done well on the road this season.

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If things are bad now in the theatrical business, what will they be next year? If the residents of the professions are to be believed, many of our favorite actors will be seen singing up force on the footlights inside of a twelvemonth! There is certainly no immediate danger of that, for it is an difficult a matter now as it was five years ago to fill out a really strong cast, but there are at least a few faces to alarm the timid ones. At this season of the year most of the time for the following year is booked at the out of town houses. This is done so that the proprietor may know just how he will probably stand at an early date as possible. Naturally there are some cancellations during the spring, and when he gets to this city in June he is generally kept busy filling in the weeks that drooms upon him despite attractions. This year, however, the best managers are timid and therefore very little booking has yet been done in the smaller cities.

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The production of "The Black Cardinal," which is soon to be made by Charles H. Martha as a prominent Broadway theater, is awaited with great interest because of the fact that the author is a Roman Catholic priest, Thev. John Talbot Smith. There have been other dramas written by priests, but as Mr. Martha is known to be a shrewd and exceptionally conservative manager it is generally conceded that the forthcoming play is not unlikely to be something out of the ordinary. The author of the play is an ardent admirer of the stage and deeply deplores the fact that it has recently fallen into a vein of impropriety. The worst phase of the affair, by the way, is that the managers seem to be willing to help along the "falling" with all the means at their command—but that is another story.

"The Black Cardinal" is a Roman story, and it is historical. The central theme is the struggle between Napoleon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII. The student will at once recognize the possibilities of such a story. The stage picture is about the time when Napoleon, after having imprisoned the pope had a number of cardinals taken to Paris. One of these was Gonsalvi, the secretary of Pius, and it is from him that the play gets its name. He it was who, after Napoleon had divorced Josephine and married Maria Louise of Austria, persuaded his fellow cardinals to refuse to attend the wedding ceremonies. Napoleon was enraged and sent Gonsalvi off to some little town, at the same time forbidding him to wear his red robes of office.

The drama is said by those who have read the manuscript to abound in dramatic situations, not the least striking of which is Gonsalvi's tearing of Fouche's offer to him of the papacy in exchange for his support of Napoleon. A cast of exceptional strength is promised, and it remains to be seen whether New Yorkers will support it. Its commendable effort the same measure of support which has been extended to the "Peter the Hammerhead Barbarian" Elsie, and the romantic picture of impostors, "The Conquerors," which, despite all that has been said about it and against it, is doing continuous business.

ARTHUR CRISPIN.

A FAVORITE IN ENGLISH OPERA.

MISS CHRYSTAL DUNCAN.

Miss Chrystal Duncan, as a singer and actress, is not unworthy to be ranked among the leading lyric artists on the stage. She is leading soprano of an English opera company, and has taken leading parts in something like 20 operas. Santosa, in Managers "Hustle Chrissie," is her favorite role, and she was the first to sing it in London in English. She looks forward with pleasure to soon getting the chance to play the leading soprano role in "Dorothoeus" and "Rebecca" and for these her fine soprano voice and dramatic abilities eminently fit her.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

One of the most onlyts as well as pleasing things to contemplate at the present moment in the theatrical world is the blest business arrangement existing between Miss Julia Arthur and her brother and manager, Arthur Lewis. It is seldom that sentiment ever creeps into business, and it is still more seldom that "whenever it does the two assimilate.

There is much in the unpublished history of how the present arrangement came to exist between Miss Arthur and her brother, and it might be no harm if it were generally known by the public, for it might give a higher opinion of some people in general. The recent graduation of Miss Arthur as a star by her brother has been the realization of an ideal which each has cherished for many years. It is also the result of honest and well directed labor by each of them for that end in view—Miss Arthur in the realm of the drama and Mr. Lewis in the pathe of business. Each has served a severe apprenticeship until the justified right of one as a star and the other as a manager can be truthfully said to have been earned. It was interesting, too, to note that the debut of each to his or her ultimate aim was made at the same moment—one as manager and the other as a star.

The congenial relations of this remarkable brother and sister have been a matter of note to those who have known them since their childhood. Miss Arthur showed this when, in her original entrance upon the stage, she chosen the name of Lewis to that of her brother's given name, Arthur. It is surely a source of congratulation that their efforts have met with so much success to excite—the height of honest fame and renown accorded to the sister as a star and the largest receipts of the present theatrical season accorded the brother as an acknowledgment that his attraction is one of the very strongest on the road. Surely no one who knows either one intimately begrudges them their good fortune, which, in this case, is not fortune, but merited reward.

They Obeyed Orders.

It is related of Fanny Kemble that she carried the tragic spirit of the stage into everyday affairs. While in Boston she stopped at the Tremont House and was accustomed to dine in her room at 5 o'clock. On one occasion the waiter brought her dinner ten minutes too soon, and she made him take it away until the hour had struck. On another occasion she gave the servant some clothes for the laundry.

"When can these be returned to me, washed and ironed?" she inquired.

"Very, after tomorrow, madam, at noontime."

"Do it so," was the dramatic reply, "at 12 o'clock on Wednesday." At noon on the hour appointed the clothes had not been returned, and at ten minutes past noon a servant stood before her in response to the short summons of the bell.

"My clothes that were to be returned at 12 today—bring them."

"Madam, we have not been able to get them ready, owing to a difficulty in the laundry. You shall have them tomorrow."

"Bring them now—they were promised today."

"I know it, madam, but they are not ready."

"It matters not to me; bring them just as they are."

The servant went out, and a few moments later two men entered, bearing a tub full of seaside and wet clothes, set it on the floor and went out.

Tilted Actors.

The Earl of Rosslyn, who has lately joined the ranks of the theatrical profession, is said to be the first member of the peerage to do so. He will play under the stage name of Stuart Erskine in Pinero's comedy, "Trelawney of the Wells." Lord Rosslyn, who is descended from Charles II—not much of a claim, it is true, saving the royal blood—his ancestress being Barbara Villiers, the famous Duchess of Cleveland, is another descendant of the Merry Monarch is on the stage—the son of Lord Alexander Gordon Lennox—the young man playing under the name of Gordon Gordon. This actor is descended from the Duke of Richmond. It is doubtful, however, if all this noble descent will count much the side of the stage, and this young man has had the opportunity of estimating the drawing power of his noble sycophidous.

Athletic Actresses.

Athletics have seized the stage. Women of the Marie Dressler and May Irwin build are just now quite the most conspicuous people and right in the middle of the stage. Physical strength is to be a Physical superiority was formerly shown only by the high kickers. But Lottie Carter came along with her feat clapper and great swing. Others followed, and now their name is legion, and the people rather like them. Of course they are not doing much in the line of comedy, but they are contributing many chapters to the history of high art, but they make fun of themselves and each other, and the people laugh and the handles grows fat—and that begin lines.

ABOUT PLAYS AND PLAYERS.

Consequently few theater goers who see Joseph Jefferson in "The Cricket on the Hearth" will wonder that Connie Jackson, who plays Tilda Slowboy in "Rip Van Winkle," is Mr. Jefferson's sister. Nature does so much surprise when it makes them the lady who defly blends the girlish and the grotesque in her droll characterization was a Lipman's soubrette before most of us were born.

Dan Hart is to dramatize Opie Read's book, "Old Sturgeon." Theodore Hamilton has been engaged to play the principal part.

Miss Rhea Mitchell, who has lately joined the ranks of the theatrical profession, is said to be the first member of the peerage to do so. He will play under the stage name of Stuart Erskine in Pinero's comedy, "Trelawney of the Wells." Lord Rosslyn, who is descended from Charles II—not much of a claim, it is true, saving the royal blood—his ancestress being Barbara Villiers, the famous Duchess of Cleveland, another descendant of the Merry Monarch is on the stage—the son of Lord Alexander Gordon Lennox—the young man playing under the name of Gordon Gordon. This actor is descended from the Duke of Richmond. It is doubtful, however, if all this noble descent will count much the side of the stage, and this young man has had the opportunity of estimating the drawing power of his noble sycophidous.