

A SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENT THEATER MOVEMENT.

JOHN BLAIR'S LITERARY STAGE PRODUCTIONS

BY ARTHUR CRISPIN.

JOHN BLAIR'S course of modern plays may be set down as a success. Two performances have been given in this city so far this season and there are three more to come. All previous attempts to inaugurate anything like an independent theater movement here have failed, and it is possible that the reason for the success of the Blair enterprise is traceable to the shrewd and practical business methods which have been applied in this case. Instead of confining themselves to operations in this city and starting out without any but the most ephemeral plans, Mr. Blair's business associates very sagaciously looked over the field for the two cities which would be likely to accord their enterprise the most valuable and consistent support. They decided in favor of Washington and Boston, and those two cities are sharing with New York the distinction of supporting in a substantial manner a really worthy independent theater movement. This liberal policy on the part of Mr. Blair's

good fortune to see it that James A. Herne was likely to make his mark as a playwright of note, and at the time there was nothing among his several contributions to stage literature to warrant any such prediction.

"For the Crown" was the next play considerably out of the usual rut to be presented in this city. Mr. Edwin Vroom was the sponsor of this enterprise, and although a large sum of money was spent upon it and the play

persons behind the various movements were not cranks or faddists, but men and women who were sincerely laboring for the elevation of popular taste, asking no other reward in most cases than the knowledge that their service was appreciated.

The principal figures to be considered with regard to Mr. Blair's success in a field which is strewn with the remains of worthy and in many cases stillborn enterprises are the persons who do the writing, the persons who attend to the business matters.

On the literary staff we find such men as Charles Henry Meltzer, Paul Kester and George Peabody Eustis. Mr. Meltzer is a scholar in all that the word implies. He has made many adaptations of foreign plays, and he is besides probably the best dramatic critic in this country, despite his frequent seeming undue severity and at times even unfairness toward American plays of the lighter order. Mr. George Peabody Eustis is the nephew of our late ambassador to France. While in Paris he was connected with several independent theater movements, and since his return to this country has made some very creditable translations of foreign plays. Mr. Paul Kester first

best that this country contains, but no model is so good that it may be abjectly followed with profit to the follower. Only a few of the good points will be caught, while nearly all of the bad ones are certain to be assimilated. Miss Kahn's peculiar gait in walking across the stage is an evidence of the correctness of this statement. She doubtless would defend this by saying that she walks naturally. She does not, for she does not always walk that way. She is simply unconsciously imitating Mrs. Fiske, whose walk is not one of her greatest charms, but who would nevertheless put herself under the instruction of a dancing master if she moved about the stage as Miss Kahn does at times.

The history of the John Blair independent theater movement is given so that the people of other cities than New York, Boston and Washington may learn how success was won in the face of the greatest discouragement. There is no reason whatever why the artistically inclined persons of several cities a few hundred miles apart cannot combine and inaugurate similar movements. Already there is talk of forming an independent theater movement in Chicago, with Minneapolis, St. Paul and Milwaukee as "visiting cities."

A PACING DOG.

M. B. Scott, a veterinary surgeon of Fairbault, S. D., has a novelty in the shape of a wonderful pacing dog. So far as is known, this is the only instance on record of a pacing dog.

THE WORLD OF SPORT

Leo Etherington's
Comment
On Current Topics.

EVERYBODY who is interested in cycling, and that includes a large part of the community, will be glad to know that the contention between the League of American Wheelmen and the National Cycling association will probably be a thing of the past by the time the outdoor season opens next spring. The strivings of both these associations to control the racing situation in this country hurt the game to a great extent and has been largely responsible for the falling off in membership of the L. A. W.

The end will probably be attained by a complete abandonment of racing by the league, although none of the officials will acknowledge such a thing as yet. Nevertheless the fact that some of the most prominent racing officials have declared that the L. A. W. will probably relinquish control of the professional and pay attention only to amateur racing shows which way the wind is blowing.

To an outsider this declaration that the league will endeavor to govern only the "simon pure" seems entirely consistent, as that body is an amateur organization. As a matter of fact, however, it is the amateurs who have caused the league more trouble in the past than ever the pros did.

Then, again, as no race meet is complete without both amateurs and professionals, it would be rather a difficult matter for both the L. A. W. and the N. C. A. to have officials at the same races, each ruling a part of the events. Collisions would be bound to occur, and trouble, followed by bad feeling, would be the inevitable result.

Another point to be considered is that the foremost amateurs of the country are now registered with the N. C. A., and that body is not likely to turn over their control to the league, nor are the riders likely to go back to the fold of themselves, especially since they have fared better under the new state of affairs than under the old regime.

So, as I said at first, the struggle will probably soon be over. The L. A. W. officials will in all likelihood voluntarily relinquish their nominal hold on the professionals, and, finding they have no amateurs left in the fold, will give up the struggle to maintain their sway over the latter in as graceful a manner as they can.

The whist season is now in full swing. Interclub and intercity tournaments are being held in many states, while every week matches are being played for the valuable trophies of the A. W. L. and other whist associations. There are now probably more people playing the great indoor game than ever before, and one of the best signs of the times is the attempt being made at Princeton to get up a tournament among the students. If the movement shall prove a success, the winners of this tournament will challenge other colleges, and in this way it is hoped that an intercollegiate whist tournament for the championship will become an annual affair. If the game is taken

up in this manner by the universities and takes its regular place among the recognized winter games, such as chess, it will be a great factor in developing the game and prevent it from ever again falling into obscurity.

More than the usual amount of interest is being taken by college men this winter in track and field sports in view of the fact that several of the larger universities have signified their intention to send teams next summer to France to compete in the international sports to be held at the Paris exposition. Princeton was the first to decide on sending a team abroad, and as a result many of the crack interscholastic athletes who entered colleges last fall chose the New Jersey institution so as to have a chance for a trip abroad.

Other colleges were not slow in following the example set by Old Nassau, until now it is probable that America will be splendidly represented at the Olympian games, and a goodly share of the laurels are sure to rest on American brows. Cornell, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Chicago universities will probably be among those who will send representatives to Europe. If Yale and Harvard cannot get the Oxford and Cambridge men to come over here for a return set of games, it is possible that they will take another trip to England to meet the Brits and then go on to Paris to compete there.

I was talking the other day to a man who is greatly interested in athletic sports, especially in bicycle racing. He was commenting on the outlook for outdoor athletics next summer. Said he:

"Bicycle racing will not obtain its chief support next summer in the larger cities, as has been the case heretofore. The sport will assume a new phase, judging from information now at hand. The smaller cities and towns will be the chief supporters of the game for some seasons to come. The reason for this is that residents of big centers have so many diverse forms of amusement from which to pick and choose that they do not long remain constant to any one, but go from one to another, as fancy dictates. There will still be bicycle racing in the larger cities, but most of it will be seen elsewhere."

Then came the natural question, To what particular form of outdoor sport will these fickle supporters of athletics in large cities turn their attention during the coming summer?

Just at present it looks to me as if there were two pastimes, one of which will have the call, and the one chosen will depend upon events soon to be determined. If the baseball magnates give up their disgraceful quarreling and disgusting methods of carrying on the game and give the public good, clean ball without the exhibitions of rowdiness and other things that have hurt the sport so much in the past, then baseball will once more reign

supreme. The big crowds will once again be seen, and it will be possible to speak of it with truth as the national sport.

If, however, the game be allowed to drag along for another year under the incubus which is now strangling it, then some other sport will receive the favor of the public. In view of the fact that track and field athletics will occupy such an important place among the games to be held at the Paris fair and the great interest taken in these games by college and other athletes over here, it is more than possible that great enthusiasm in sports of that character will be manifested during the coming season.

Some six or eight years ago the interest in such sports was at its height, and many lovers of track and field events think that during 1900 the sport loving public will return to its old favorites.

LEO ETHERINGTON.

A SKILLFUL PIECE OF ACTING.

There's a mighty skillful leading up to the prettiest song in "Sister Mary," May Irwin's new play. May Irwin and her friends are having a little whist party. Miss Irwin is Alicia Penn, and Herbert Gresham is Percival Penn, her husband.

There's a little tune that keeps running through Percival's mind, and he hums it absentmindedly as he plays his hand. Miss Irwin looks over at him and asks:

"What is that you are humming, Percival?"

"I don't know," answers Percival; "something I heard on the street the other day. Can't remember the name of it."

And he goes on with his whist. But a little later he starts unconsciously on the tune again, and again Miss Irwin asks:

"Percival, if you don't stop that tune you'll worry me all evening. I know I've heard it somewhere before, and it's very vexing not to be able to remember it."

In a few minutes Miss Irwin throws down her hand and cries:

"I've got it! I knew I had heard that song. It goes like this."

And then she starts singing "My Bed is Like a Little Boat," the daintiest little air in the town. The girls and boys join in, and there you have as prettily a worked up effect as you will find in all theaterdom.

MISS BERRI'S MISHAP.

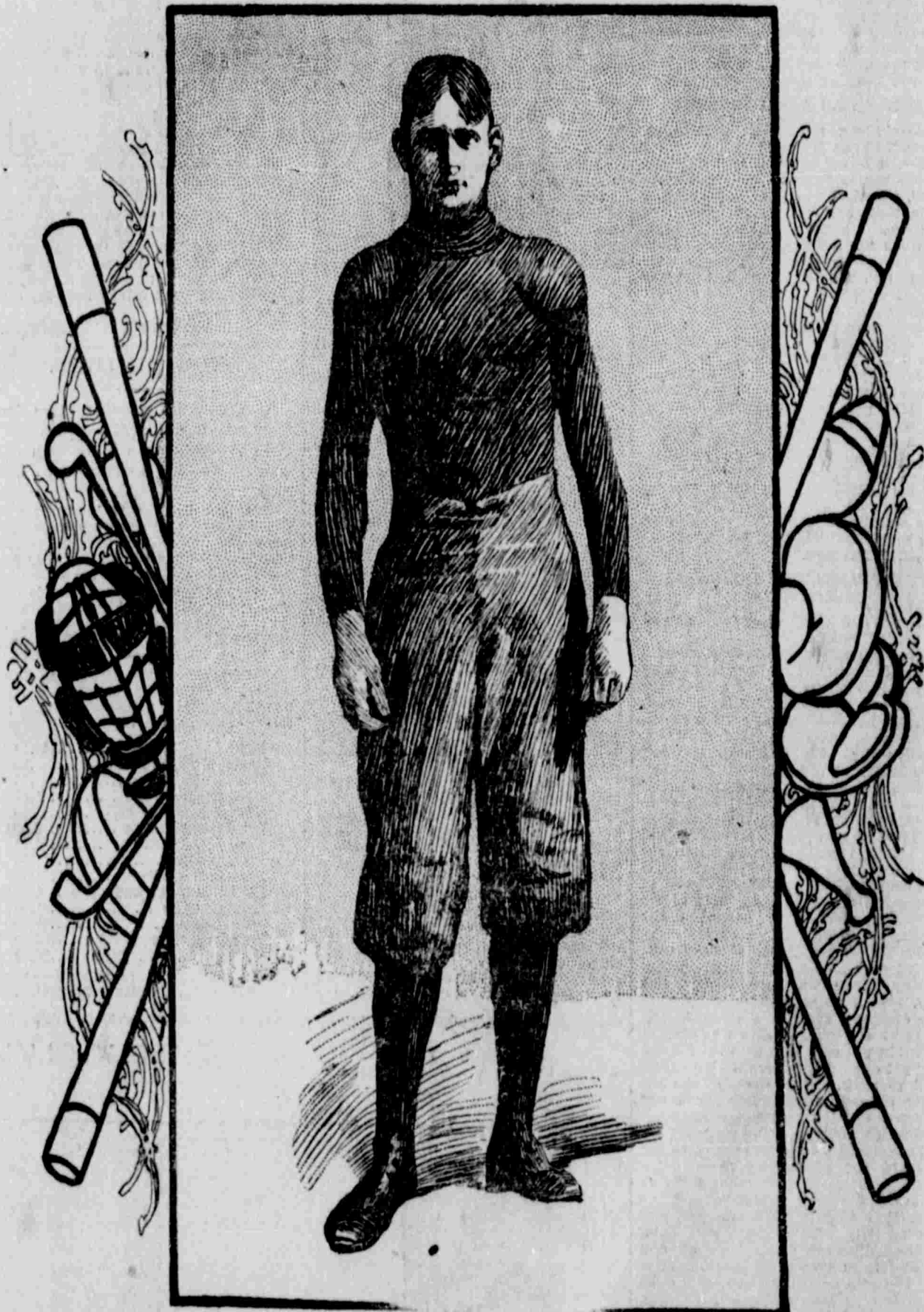
Miss Maude Lillian Berri made her first professional appearance in November, 1895, as the prima donna of "The Maid of Mariboead" Opera company, which was organized in Boston. The company had only one week's rehearsal and were in the main amateurs. They were unfamiliar with stage appliances, knew nothing about "drops" and "flies"—in fact hardly knew the entrance from the prompter's box.

On the second night of the season, which continued for five days, Miss Berri decided during the performance that she would cross to the other side of the stage. She noticed the "back drop" representing an ocean, but she had no idea what it was, and proceeded to stride complacently across the stage.

Her up to date imitation of "Moses and the Red Sea" was rudely interrupted with shrieks of laughter from the people in front, which was climaxed by a voice from the back of the house which yelled, "Look out, little girl, you will get your feet wet."

"Quo Vadis" made a hit in Chicago as a spectacular play.

YALE'S FINEST ALL AROUND ATHLETE.



The finest all around athlete at Yale is Albert Hayes Sharpe, who won fame last fall in the annual football game against Princeton by dropping the hardest and longest field goal of the season. Sharpe is one of the best leading intercollegiate strong men and was last spring a member of the freshmen crew. He is one of the best gymnasts in the longest ever undertaken by an American college team. Last winter the Yale basketball team defeated all competitors and claimed the title of champion.

fuses to vacate a seat for which he holds no coupon. The incident in question occurred in a continuous vaudeville house in the capital.

"Prince Karl" was Mr. Mansfield's first production as a star. Seventeen other productions have followed. Of these 15 were written for him.

Johnstone Bennett, though one would scarcely imagine it from her present work, was once Richard Mansfield's

leading woman, originating the part of Marion in "Monsieur." Her early experience was gained in a repertory, her initial debut being in the time tried role of Eliza in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Mr. B. F. Keith, of the continuous performance fame, is showing his superb abundant enterprise in a new direction. He has just made a proposition offering \$50,000 yearly to the municipality of Boston for the privilege of operating

surface cars on several of the streets there, at the same time promising 3 cent fares.

That well known and able actor in his line, P. A. Anderson, has been engaged by Manager Robert E. Johnston to play Quip, with Mary Sanders, in "Little Nell and the Marchioness." He was the Quip in Lotta's production of Brougham's version of the story years ago.

LEADERS IN THE INDEPENDENT THEATER MOVEMENT.



business management has done much to put the enterprise on a paying footing.

Mr. Blair's project is not the first of its kind to be attempted in New York. It has had during the last decade at least half a dozen predecessors. About six or seven years ago the Theater of Arts and Letters had a brief and tempestuous career, which ended in comparative disaster. The moving purpose of the enterprise was the encouragement of native dramatic authorship, and, while the scheme was a worthy one in every sense, there were the mistakes inseparable from all new movements. It was seen that there was ample pecuniary support for a scheme of that sort in this city and it was claimed at the time that the promoters succeeded in raising—and spending—the sum of \$50,000, although it is possible that the amount was somewhat exaggerated. Plays of supposedly great literary merit by Mary Wilkins, Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Richard Harding Davis were produced, but they were all, to say the least, comparative failures. Mr. Blair has avoided the mistake of producing dramas by untried writers for the stage, as those plays which he gives are while possessed of the same literary excellence, the work of dramatists of experience, albeit most of them have a weakness for lecturing on some pet problem or other from behind the footlights.

The next effort in the direction of an independent theater was made by Courtney Thorpe, who presented Ibsen's "Ghosts." This, it should be stated, was preceded by a production of "Hannele," by Gerhardt Hauptmann. The translation had been made by Charles Henry Meltzer and the staging is said to have been done largely under his direction. The business end of the enterprise, however, as well as the backing, was furnished by a firm of theatrical managers, and it is therefore hardly proper to classify it as an independent theater movement. "Hannele" was assailed on every hand as being sacrilegious, and there was much talk of enjoining the performance on that ground. The play, to anticipate these criticisms, is said to have been altered in the translation, and whether or not that was the cause it certainly proved a signal failure from all but the artistic standpoint. Mr. Thorpe naturally did not have this aggressive opposition to contend with, and he gave "Ghosts" several times in this city and Boston with some success, although the patronage was of a rather desultory nature.

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. James A. Herne had given the former's play, "Margaret Fleming," at Palmer's theater, as I recollect it. This play was received by most competent critics with every evidence of appreciation, but the public failed to become enthusiastic over it. Personally, I regard it as the best thing ever written by Mr. Herne. It was a close, almost a slavish, following of Ibsen, but it was, nevertheless, exceptionally interesting in spots. It was "Margaret Fleming," by the way, that convinced those who had

itself was a most worthy and poetic work Mr. Vroom was scarcely sufficient ability as an actor to carry the burden of the artistic side of the enterprise. Many business mistakes, in the opinion of good judges, were made, so "For the Crown" came to an untimely end.

"For the Crown" was succeeded the next year by a production of Alphonse Daudet's "L'Arlésienne." This piece was financed by some gentlemen who had been led into parting with a few dollars by a band of enthusiasts who were impressed with the artistic possibilities of Daudet's work. But the "angels," as angels frequently do, withdrew at the critical moment, and the enterprise died of inanition. Next on the list was the Criterion theater organization. Ibsen's "John Gabriel Borkman" and Jose Echegaray's "El Gran Galeoto" were presented in a highly creditable manner, but success had not yet been attained from the viewpoint of the business office. At about this time Miss Elizabeth Robins, nothing daunted by the fate of her predecessors, arrived here from England and made a production of "Hedda Gabler," which was not, in the opinion of most persons, either very good or very bad. The next independent theater venture was John Blair's, which was made last season. Had Mr. Blair not had associated with him, in both a business and literary way, gentlemen who had complete and unwavering faith in the inherent strength of the scheme it is likely that another failure in a worthy cause would have to be recorded. But as it is, success has come and an impetus has been given the worthy side of the drama the importance of which cannot well be overestimated.

Nothing which purports to be even a casual history of the independent theater movement in New York city would be complete without some allusion to the effect which the productions made some years ago by Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske had in putting our public into a condition of mind to accept plays of the type here discussed. Mrs. Fiske's consummate, and up to that time almost unsuspected, art gave these dramas new significance, and people for the first time saw that they were really great works, and that the

came into prominence as a playwright when he was furnishing romantic dramas for the use of the late Alexander Salvini. He, too, has adapted numerous plays of foreign authorship, and while all of his contributions to stage literature have not been abnormally successful none of them has been in any sense unworthy.

The men who are responsible for the business management of the Blair enterprise are Mr. Vaughan Kester and Mr. F. H. Paine. The former is a newspaper man of wide experience who has also dabbled in theatrical matters. The latter is a retired naval officer who has gone into the thing from pure love of it.

Of the players, the two who necessarily carry the burden of the artistic phases of the enterprise are Mr. Blair himself and his leading woman, Miss Florence Kahn, a young girl from Memphis whose stage experience has been limited to one season in the leading female role of "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

Mr. Blair's work is commendable from every standpoint. What is more, he is improving with each production. It is only necessary to say that he is as certain to be recognized as one of the best actors on the American stage within the next few years as day is to follow night. Many an actor holding an excellent position at some prominent theater in this city might sit at Mr. Blair's feet and study his method with great profit to himself.

Miss Florence Kahn is nothing less than a histrionic marvel. She is even of greater promise than was Blanche Bates one year ago when she created a sensation by her performance of the adventures in "The Great Ruby." In justice to Miss Kahn, however, attention must be called to two serious faults which she ought to lose no time in correcting. One is a tendency to work the scheme of repression almost to the breaking point and then, without the slightest warning, to pour out the words in a torrent of almost amateurish declamation. Miss Kahn has a magnificent voice, and the temptation to make it do its full duty at times is perhaps irresistible, but while her fault in using it is easily understood, it is none the less serious. Miss Kahn's other weakness is the slavish imitation of Mrs. Fiske to which she often treats us. Mrs. Fiske is an admirable model, the

though a trotting dog is not unheard of, and a man named Harry Ketcham, a Canadian, once owned a trotter whom he called Doc. This dog, which was a pointer, he exhibited at race tracks and fairs all over the country. He was said to have made \$10,000 out of the animal.

Dr. Scott's dog will race against either a horse or a bicycle, and seems to enjoy it, though he evidently regards it as a serious matter. Gypsy, as the doctor calls him, can make very good time, and Dr. Scott has speeded him from a standing start to make a quarter of a mile in 45 seconds and the first eighth in 20 seconds.

When he was teaching him to pace, Dr. Scott put small string hobbles on him in order to prevent him from breaking.

Gypsy paced a little before the doctor bought him, though so little to be of no consequence; but his new master thought he saw possibilities of the dog doing better, and began a course of careful and systematic training until he obtained the present result.

The dog is a pure blooded St. Bernard and weighs 140 pounds, is 3 feet tall, measures 6 feet from the tip of his bushy tail to the end of his handsome nose and is about 4 years old. He races alone, without a driver, and, besides being a very fine animal, is a real curiosity.

WITTY VICTOR HERBERT.

There is a plump little chorus girl in the Alice Nielsen Opera company who holds her head a little higher and tilts her nose a little more than the other girls because she considers that she was highly complimented by the composer, Victor Herbert.

It was the other evening, on the stage of the New York Casino. Victor Herbert had gone back to visit Miss Nielsen. In one of the narrow passages, he was bumped into by the pretty chorister.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Herbert. Did I touch you?" she asked.

"No, but you may if you want to," replied the witty Irish composer.

John Drew's eldest child, a daughter, now about 17, brought up in a convent, wants to follow the traditions of the Drew family and go upon the stage.

record that the stage has sometimes been instrumental in reviving an old time fashion, a New York tailor of prominence is quoted as saying that "well dressed men in club life or in society never imitate the actors."

A decision of general interest to theatergoers was rendered recently by the supreme court at Washington. It was established that a theater manager is justified in ejecting a patron who re-

Sardou has finished a play called "The Witch," based on the story of Mme. De Brinvilliers, the famous poisoner. It is intended for Sara Bernhardt.

A writer apparently familiar with the subject says not more than ten actors in America, aside from the stars, receive as much as \$250 a week and not

more than five actresses are paid this amount. In fact, \$150 a week is exceptional. The general run of salary for fairly good people, from members of the chorus up to subrettes, juvenile or old men, varies from \$12 up to \$25. The Morton family has certainly done much for Crane, and the same may be said of Crane in regard to the house of

Morton. It was Miss Martha Morton who gave the actor "Brother John," "His Wife's Father" and "A Fool of Fortune," all of which were marked successes. Then Miss Morton got married. Now her brother, Michael Morton, takes Crane's measure in "A Rich Man's Son."

Dress certainly has a powerful influence in shaping the destinies of a certain class of plays, and while it is on