STAGELAND.

ARTHUR CRISPIN'S LETTER.

Theatrical News and Gossip of the Week in New York City. Rumors From the Rialto.

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New York, April 14.—The theatrical season in New York, as in many of the smaller cities of the country, is now fairly on the wane. Several of the houses here have already closed, and others will do so shortly. Every season has its wane and eventually come to an end, and that condition is of itself not significant, but the fact that this particular season has seen it in its into the waning business so early is decidedly ominous. I asked a prominent manager the other night for his explanation of this undesirable change. He followed the fashion of the day by asserting that the bicycle is responsible for the early falling off in patronage. As, by common consent, the bicycle has been blamed during the last few years for every change in business conditions, this theory was not a particularly novel or satisfying one. But the manager then condescended to go a bit further, and I think he contrived to really strike at the root of the evil.

He said that there are too many theaters now and that cities which a few years ago were veritable Klondikes for traveling companies have degenerated into tolerably fair two-night stands which one is obliged to play for a week and of course lose money. The success of the original houses tempted so many persons to go into the business that the goose that laid the golden egg was speedily laid low herself. The show business is not alone in the tendency to fall into these blunders, but I'll wager that it can show more and bigger mistakes than any other profession in the country, for when it comes down to doing that which no sensible man would regard as even worthy of consideration for a moment the theatrical magnate is always well to the fore, with his hands eagerly stretched beyond the line.

And, speaking of the practically ended season, it has been unique in many respects. Business on the road has been ghostly enough to make Banquo's ghost hide his diminished shadowiness in shame. A few shows have made money in the smaller cities, but those which were so fortunate as to secure a week or a few seconds, while those which either came to grief or had a hard time to avoid it are so numerous that to do so would fill a good deal of space in this column.

Here again has the curse of too many theaters made itself felt. Towns which ought to have a single place of amusement and about two shows a week have three or four theaters and possibly three performances a week in some. There is just about as much room to be short in amusements in our place, and when that is divided by 3 or 4 it is about up to the quotient to be found to represent disappointment and disappointment for the manager.

In this city, on the other hand, business has been exceptionally good, and prosperity good. Those entertainments which were really worthy have had long runs and have made small fortunes for their proprietors. There has, it is true, been a paucity of good plays, and the result has been that much of no special value has been patronized far beyond its deserts. It is also a deplorable fact that there was a distinct trend toward the frothy. Broadly minded farces, in which the bold object appears to be to test the forbearance of the audience and to learn to what point the people on the stage will be permitted to go along the road to suggestiveness without a protest from either the police or the public. The "think," however, appears to be a veritable will-o'-the-wisp, for it is never reached, and each year in this city sees the audacity of certain exponents of "legs and lingerie" increased. There are those who believe that these people will take a different tack next season, not because of any change of heart, but for the reason that while the public is apparently willing to tolerate any amount of indecency at which the police do not blind the field has been so thoroughly disshed over that there is no longer a possibility of providing the so called "startling novelties" which New Yorkers like to delude themselves into believing are the only things they will tolerate.

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The final authoritative announcement that Viola Allen will positively try starring next season has set the tongues of the gossips along the Rialto to wagging overtime. As in all such cases, these fellows predict certain and dire disaster for the talented leading lady of the Empire theater stock company. They give many reasons, chief among which is that "she is not well enough known." She is certainly much better known than was Maude Adams, whose success as a star has eclipsed that of any other stellar debutante of the past decade. I am inclined to think that the recent turn in the affairs of Miss Adams and Henry Miller has had much to do with influencing Miss Allen to strike out for herself, but these two remained with Mr. Frohman and had the influence of his name and management. It is whispered that no matter what denials may be made it is still possible that Miss Allen will arrange with Mr. Frohman to handle her initial starring tour. If she should do that, there could be little question of the successful outcome of the enterprise.

But, if Miss Allen's break from the Empire company has caused the Malthusian to shatter like magpies, what shall be said of the effect produced upon them by the announcement of the name of her successor? As has been stated generally, Miss Jessie Millward is to take the place made vacant by the retirement of Miss Allen. Miss Millward is best known in England as an exponent of the heroines of melodrama such as are exploited most frequently at the Drury Lane theater, London. She nearly always played the opposite parts to William Terriss, who was recently murdered by a crank. She was to the feminine side of high grade melodrama what Terriss was to the male side. She was a co-star with him on a tour of this country which is said to have been fairly, though not superlatively, successful, and it was the opinion of many persons whose judgment is entitled to consideration that Terriss was much the better performer of the pair.

Still, no one will contend that Miss Millward is not a competent actress. The only point at issue is as to whether she will be able to win the approval of audiences and critics accustomed to the careful and always artistic work of Miss Allen. As Mr. Charles Frohman is said to have made his decision when it comes to the selection of a successor to a public favorite and has never yet made a mistake in that direction, it is but fair to assume that he had some very potent reason for engaging Miss Millward.

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The matter, though, which has irritated the Malthusians so greatly is that Mr. Frohman should have gone to the other side of the water for a new leading woman for the Empire company. They argue that, even supposing that no woman here is better fitted for the position from a histrionic standpoint, there are many in this country who are certainly more peculiarly adapted to the roles which usually fall to the lot of the leading lady of the Empire, by reason of the possession of youth and great beauty. This is unpalatable and not wholly true. Miss Millward is of course older than she was some years ago, but she can "make up" to look very young on the stage, and while she is not as beautiful as Lillian Russell or Maxine Elliott she is a very comely woman. She is what might be called "vivid" in her stage methods and it is more than likely that she will win her way into the hearts of the patrons of the Empire theater, particular and captious as they sometimes are.

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If ever a woman deserved sympathy at the same time that she excited admiration, that woman is Julia Arthur. When, immediately after the beginning of her initial starring tour in "A Lady of Quality," everything she had in the world was turned in a heap in Detroit, her friends feared that she would simply give up and go back to a position in some other company. But they must have been woefully ignorant of this young woman's character. She set to work at once to have everything replaced and opened her New York engagement on time. Then she began to make money again, and when things looked brightest for her she was stricken with a serious illness, which came nearer to having a fatal termination than most persons imagined. Still, she has been a great success and can now take her pick of the bookings in the most prominent theaters of the country. She will have absolute rest this season, and it is predicted that she will be as strong as ever when the next season opens.

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And while on this topic it may not be amiss to call attention to the fact that the person who has stood between Miss Arthur and trouble whenever it has threatened is Arthur Lewis, her brother, from whose first name the tots her stage surname. This was Mr. Lewis' first season as a manager, and he was beset at the beginning by scores of announcements which would have discouraged most people. Everything he did in the direction of exploiting his star was ridiculed by the "old timers," who cannot be brought to believe that anything that is original can be meritorious. The fact that most of these same ideas have since been widely imitated ought to be some solace to the youthful and talented manager for the many jibes with which they were at first greeted. It may not be generally known, but it is true, that while the fire in Detroit was still raging Mr. Lewis telegraphed an order to this city for a complete reproduction of the elaborate "sets" which were at the moment blazing and crackling merrily in the fiery furnace of the Detroit Opera House. The order has lots of pluck, as has the brother, and so long as the business relations of such a pair continue it is hard to fancy any force failure can ever fix its blighting touch upon them.

Arthur Crispin.

A Nimble Young Acrobat.

Nine-year-old Amy Hardcastle of Philadelphia is a wonder in her way. She is one of the most nimble little dancers and acrobats in the country, and the more or more of medals that decorate her breast show that her talents have been appreciated. The little fellow on her knee and on her book, tights, moccasins and headpieces, sash, ward, trestward and sideways, and leaves is a very clever little shaper. It is remarked that she has closed an engagement to appear in London.

A NEW STORY TOLD ABOUT H. E. ABBEY.

Interesting Scene Between the Famous Manager and John T. Raymond That Took Place In Abbey's London Office.

The late Henry E. Abbey was very busy in his London office one day in August, 1891. A number of clerks at desks in different parts of the room were hard at work, coming now and then with unfinished paper in hand and receiving a quiet word of instruction from their chief, or advising with one another, comparing documents or consulting ledgers, but all working industriously and silently. The place was far more suggestive of the executive seat of some gigantic commercial house than the office of a showman. It was near the opening of Mr. Abbey's season at the Lyceum theater, London, and of his still more important operatic ventures at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, besides Henry Irving's first tour in America under his management.

Mr. Abbey himself was busier than any of his clerks. His table was heaped with papers. At one side, and devoted entirely to his private and personal correspondence, by a magnificently bound alligator leather writing desk, ornamented with silver mountings and with Mr. Abbey's initials in large silver letters upon its lid. The busy manager was writing slowly, but so intently and cautiously that the importance of his work was evident. Now and then a messenger, cap in hand, would silently give him a telegram or a cablegram, which he would read and answer without a word and then resume his work. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and this almost solemn silence was interrupted by a heavy voice that any American would have recognized in a moment in whatever part of the globe he might happen to be in.

"Hello, Henry! Here I am. I start for Liverpool at 4.15. I couldn't leave without bidding you goodby."

It was John T. Raymond. He came in with a valise in one hand and an umbrella in the other. I think, too, he wore a linen duster. He began to speak before he was seen, he was speaking as he entered and continued to speak with scarcely an interruption until he made his exit. It was like his first entrance in a new comedy. The same was his, and he held the stage until he left it. His talk was always funny, and as he came forward to shake hands with his manager he raised his "business" of leaving his umbrella under the arm and hooking his valise, instead of placing both on a chair or on the floor as he might have done, was altogether professional.

Mr. Abbey laid down his pen and looked up with a bored smile as the comedian rattled on, all the time enthusiastically shaking the manager's hand and cocking his heavy eye around at his audience of amused clerks in a manner so entirely of the stage that it only needed Mr. Abbey's "taking the curtain" when his hand was free and slowly separating his crushed fingers one by one to complete the old time stage business.

"Yes, Henry; I'm going back to America today; start for Liverpool in one hour; take the 4.15 train." (Looking at his watch.) "No, by Jove! I haven't got an hour. How time flies! Well, goodby, Henry, old boy. Any special message for your friends over the pond? No? All right, then. I'm off for the great republic—the land of the free and the home of the brave! England's all right, you know, Henry, but then America—ah, America! Well, goodby, old man. The best of luck to you."

"Goodby, John. The same to you and a pleasant voyage." Mr. Abbey had arisen and, evidently glad the interruption was nearly at an end, was smiling good naturedly, but with a tired look, and shaking hands with the enthusiastic comedian. By the time John had reached the door Mr. Abbey was seated at his desk again and with pen in hand was only waiting for the comedian's disappearance to resume his work. On reaching the door, however, the retreating actor stopped as if suddenly reminded of something of the utmost importance, dropped his valise to the floor, and, still retaining his umbrella in one hand, while fumbling in his trousers pocket with the other, flew back to Mr. Abbey's desk.

"Henry, before I go—I've only got one left—one solitary English sovereign. Come, now, you match me or I match you. Which shall it be?"

"No, no, John. You must excuse me. I'm very busy, and"—

"Call it, then. Here goes, now," tossing the coin in the air. "What is it? Come, now, give it a name."

"No, John, really," protested the annoyed manager, no longer concealing his impatience to resume his work. "I can't. I'm very busy, you know, and"—

"All right, Henry. No sparring blood today, eh? Then I suppose I'll have to take this 'gold' back to America with me, but I'd rather leave it with you," making a pretense of going and returning immediately. "Come, now. Just once. What is it? Head or tail? Not? Very well. Goodby, Henry." This time Mr. Abbey did not raise when he shook hands. Just then the comedian's eye lighted on the magnificent writing case on the manager's desk.

"Well, Henry, that is a beauty! Let me look at that for just one moment," taking it up without further permission. "Now, Henry, do you know, this is positively the most magnificent thing I have ever seen in all my life. A writing desk and such a writing desk! And these silver letters, H. E. A.? Oh, yes, of course, I see. 'H. E. A.'—Henry E. Abbey? Well, well! Why, this is fine enough for a gift to an emperor! A gift to an emperor? Ah, a good idea—give it to me! Make me a present of that writing desk, Henry, and I'll go back to America the proudest man in the world."

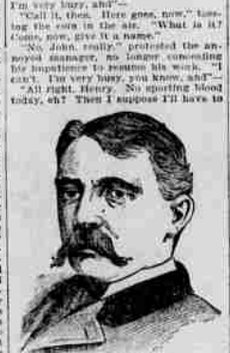
Mr. Abbey mildly refused this suggestion, as he had the proposition to many sovereigns, and seemed actually in pain between his desire to resume the important work before him and his desire not to be rude to the good natured nuisance by his side.

"You see, Henry, nothing need be changed about it. I can take it just as it is, the 'H. E. A.' and all, and when I get to America I'll go to a jeweler's as soon as I land, and right under the 'H. E. A.' I'll have him put 'To J. T. R.' Think of it, Henry, right here on the lid of the box, 'H. E. A. to J. T. R.' Why, my boy, it will improve the appearance of the case 100 per cent. Come now, Henry, what do you say? Is the box mine?"

Mr. Abbey heaved a sigh and without a word opened the case, took out the stock of his personal stationery which it contained—a part of it was monogram paper, I remember, as Mr. Abbey had but recently lost his wife—and handed the box to the comedian much as the traveler might hand his watch to the road agent.

Looking around with a smile of triumph upon his audience of thoroughly amused clerks, the comedian tucked the writing desk under his arm as if it were so much legitimate spoil, like a turkey won at a shooting match, shook his patient friend since more profoundly by the hand, all the while showering blessings upon his head, got to the door, talking as he went, received his valise and with a final "Goodby; God bless you!" which was addressed to everybody in the room, went out of the door, and I never saw John T. Raymond again.

NEWTON CHISNELL.



HENRY E. ABBEY.

A NEW WOMAN PLAYWRIGHT.

Jane Maudin-Feist is the rather peculiar name of the latest recruit in the ranks of women playwrights of America, but to many people this hyphenated surnomen conveys the information that she is a daughter of a distinguished Texas family and wife of one of the most successful young newspaper men of New York city, Colonel Fred Feist, editor and proprietor of The Tammany Times. Mrs. Feist has been known, both in her native state and in her adopted home, as a writer of clever verse and good literary matter, but she even tried her hand at editorial work on her husband's paper, with such success that the desk she usurped one day in a spirit of fun remained her undisputed possession for over a year, for she belongs to the type of fearless, independent Texas woman who does not hesitate to tackle anything from a barking bronche to a typewriter.

It was in much the same spirit that she first attempted playwriting. As is usual with young writers, her first effort was a problem play of almost melodramatic cast. This she submitted to A. M. Palmer, who, as was to be expected, returned it. But he was generous for nothing it was rather complimentary and encouraging then otherwise. They were that two plays, one by Sardou and the other Dumas' "Denise," which Mrs. Feist's piece somewhat resembled in style, had failed in America, and he feared that the public did not care for any more in the same vein. Nothing daunted by the comedy of the piece and asked that, if Mrs. Feist should ever turn her hand to lighter playwriting, she should submit the result to him. This she did at the suggestion of A. Paris Model.

The comedy was written amid many interruptions from an infant son, who came even before the Feist's attention than her literary work, and every evening she awaited the receipt of a telegram from his nurse announcing his good health with more interest and anxiety than she did the rising of the curtain on her comedy. On the night that the play was produced the telegram was delayed, and the mother—father was on the point of taking the train for New York to see if her son was all right, leaving the baby of her brain to its fate. And when, in response to calls for the author from the audience, the actors went to hunt for her they found her hidden back of a piano reading and revealing the digital knowledge that the son and heir of the Feists was all right.

Moreover, this new dramatist has not advanced beyond the stage where she thinks nobody can teach her anything. On the other hand, she is constantly courting criticisms and seeking suggestions. As a result, her work has considerably improved in several minor details during its stay here. Bright bits of business were introduced and superfluous ones were eliminated, all tending to knit together still more compactly a very cleverly constructed comedy. The principal change was that of the nationality of the hero, who was changed from German to Hibernian, this being more in keeping with the true condition of affairs in metropolitan fashion, which is so cleverly caricatured in this comedy.

It was also decided that Leo Delirichstein, as the broken down French tenor, who is to keep, so far as the entrance was devised for him in the first act, Mme. Pilar Morin is also given more opportunity for the display of her pantomimic talents, which are remarkable, and Miss Hastam, whose performance of the leading comedy role was excellent from the outset, has even improved upon that by experience, which goes to prove the dictum that plays, comedies especially, are constructed rather than written, and few of them are as complete at their first performance as was "A Paris Model."

David Belasco has provided a fund to award a medal annually to the best student in each of two classes in the American Academy of the Dramatic Arts of New York city.

STORIES OF THE STAGE.

Della Fox Has an Adventure on the Rail—Melville Stewart and the Bookseller — Humble Life of a Famous French Comedian.

A very funny story is told—not by the advance agent—of a little experience Della Fox had on a certain railway trip from Washington to New York. It seems that Della and her manager, Nat Roth, left Washington together on a Saturday night train immediately after a night's performance. They sat up enjoying the scenery by moonlight until the train pulled into a station near Baltimore. They were to step some time, and after a moment's thought the comic opera star got off to take a look at something in the depot. She was gone about ten minutes, and what was her consternation upon returning to see the train pulling out about ten feet up the track. For a moment she was dazed, and then, raising her skirts enough to show the crowd of loungers on the depot steps a decidedly well turned ankle, she struck out after the vanishing train.

A brakeman on the last car waved her back, and after a thought of the wildness of running after a train she stopped. Then she remembered that Roth had all her ready cash and started again. After a breathless trot of about 60 rods she finally saw the impossibility of catching the train and gave it up. But, lo! on turning around in deep despair she found her own train quietly waiting on a side track, with a crowd of laughing men on every platform. Another train had pulled in and out while she was in the depot, and it was this that she had chased. And Della blamed Nat for the whole business.

A pathetic story is credited to Melville Stewart, the baritone of the Castle Square Opera company. Before he went on the stage he was a clerk in a London bookshop. "One of our most frequent customers," says Mr. Stewart, telling the story, "was a shabbily dressed man. Now and then, after purchasing a shilling novel, he would ask to look at some edition de luxe of standard English authors. He would handle the books with trembling hands and return them to me with such reluctance that I felt he was a book lover. I missed him for nearly a year, when he came back to the store leading a child, dressed in mourning, as he was, and I recognized the child to be his daughter. He said to me with almost pathetic timidity:

"'I want you to prepare for me as edition de luxe of Dickens' bound without regard to cost and with the best insertions that you can get of Cruikshank's engravings.'

"I did so, and they were the most beautiful copies of the great novelist's works I ever handled—the covers a russia calf, soft as a baby's cheek, the thick, silent paper printed in the boldest type. After that I became very friendly with this gentleman and discovered his life story. He had been a poor, unfortunate clerk, with a bachelor uncle who was rich. The uncle had offered him all his life what he was forced to leave him at his death. His wife had died just one year before the donnie of the book, and he had endured for her so many privations in life, and all the luxury and wealth that he gained were like the apples of Sodom to him, except as they gave him opportunity of rearing luxuriously his child. As I say, we became very well acquainted, and I called at his house frequently. I went there one afternoon and entered the library without knocking, as he always bade me do. I saw him standing in the center of the room, the most enchanted of men, apparently, to me. He had his hands behind him. I said to him:

"'I fear that I have intruded upon you?'

"He said, 'You have not' and then, with a sharp, nervous laugh he reached out from behind his back, and, of all things in the world for a man of his years and dignity to do, he stretched forward to me a ragged, tattered, worn and soiled copy of 'Little Dorrit.' The great tears stood in his eyes as he did so.

"'Mr. Stewart,' he said, 'you, of course, are surprised at my reading a book like this, with this magnificent edition of Dickens that you present for me, but the story of that sacrificing girl has had its effect on me, and, like her, I remember the vicissitudes and the unkindness of the world, and can get a wealth of pleasure out of turning the pages of this cheap edition than I could by reading from the one you sold me.'"

Frederick Lemaitre, the famous French actor who died in poverty and neglect, the monument is soon to be erected in Paris, began his stage career in a humble way. The Gaulois tells the story of his first appearance, which was in the theater of the Variétés Amusantes. Call at the Variétés Amusantes, said Lemaitre presented himself before the director of the theater, who asked him what especial roles he wished to play.

"Oh, I'm not particular!" was the cheerful reply.

"Very well. Consider yourself engaged. From today you are a member of the troupe. Your salary is 30 francs ($6) a month. Are you satisfied?"

"I should be hard to please if I were not."

"Is that case you may begin your work on the day after tomorrow."

"But—my part?"

"Oh, it will not take long to learn that. You have strong lungs? Just shout a bit to let me hear if you have."

Frederick Lemaitre gave a roar which shook the windows in their casements.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the director enthusiastically. "You will make a magnificent fool!"

"A fool?" repeated the astonished applicant.

"Why, yes, a fool. I predict certain success for you, considering how you can roar."

Two days later the young artist, enveloped in a magnificent Boeskin, made his debut on all fours in a pantomime called "Pyramus and Thisbe."

RECENT TOPICS OF THE STAGE.

Selina Fetter will remain in vaudeville.

Camille d'Arville may sing in Berlin next year when "The Fencing Master" is produced there for the first time. Wherever she sings it would encourage her former admirers if she would do it with care and not shriek in the distressing manner which mars her voice now. Once Miss d'Arville had only had a good voice, but used it well.

Samuel Bernard and Maud Harlam are to act next winter in "The Marquis of Michigan," and the place left vacant by Bernard in Weber & Fields' company will be taken by David Warfield, who has delineated a certain type amusingly in several New York Casino pieces without ever having given much variety to it.

A little bee of ill went to the theater the other night. On the way home he said to his mother: "I'm going to write a good play. There won't be any engagements or marriages or any nonsense of that kind in it, but I'll have the actors do something on the stage all the time." If he can manage that, this little bee is the coming playwright.

Carrie Koster supposed that she took the place of Beatrice Cameron Mansfield in the Mansfield company during the illness of that actress, but as not all the leading female roles were assigned to her she became angry and resigned.

Although the money made out of "The Black Crook" exceeds the profits of any other American play. The little became a trademark for spectacular ballet over 30 years ago and has never been out of one, though now it is applied only to a female minstrel show in the low vaudeville theaters, and nothing from the original piece is retained.

At one of Leo Fuller's "At Homes," which in London and Paris are frequented by interesting men and women, Camille Flammarion and the late Alexandre Dumas met for the first time. The astronomer expressed some surprise that their paths had never before crossed. "Ah, cher maître," retorted Dumas genially, "that is easily accounted for. You rarely come down from heaven, while I—never go up there."

Modjeska is to be seen next year only in New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia, and her repertory will be confined chiefly to the Shakespeare plays.

Ellita Proctor Otis has a new play, called "Strategy," in which she will soon appear.

Madge Lessing, who was wanted for the London cast of "The Belle of New York," is unable to get a release from "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Olga Nethersole will make an American tour next season.