ROUND THE THEATRES

THE adapter is an eerie sort of creature, with a digestion so perfect that instant assimilation is almost inevitable. Give him a Shakespearean play to do up to date, and as soon as his task is finished the Bard of Avon will have faded from his memory. His own work will be the real thing, and Shakespeare merely an impertinent intruder. Set before him something "from the French" or "from the German" and, presto, prestissimo! the original sources will be gradually dropped, while the adapter will loom up as the owner of a large and potent creative mind.

At the Garden Theatre last Monday night we were treated to "His Absent Boy," which, according to the first page of the programme, was "adapted from the German by Al Neuman." This enterprising person went abroad last Summer, saw "Der Rabenvater" liked it, bought it, sold it, adapted it, and insisted that his name should appear on Mr. Palmer's programmes. What a howl of rage, of fury and despair would make the welkin ring if we heard of similar doings abroad! Suppose Paris was favored with "The Heart of Maryland" adapted "from the American" by Victorien Sardou, or Berlin with "Shenandoah" adapted "from the American" by Blumenthal! Can you hear our wild, editorial indignation? Can you picture the gnashing of teeth and the tearing of hair?

In the case of "His Absent Boy" tardy restitution is made at the end of the programme. The un-famous adapter acknowledges the existence of Messrs. Yarno and Fischer in a sort of a foot note, used for the advertising purpose of emphasizing the fact that the farce "is now in the seventh month of its phenomenally successful run at the Residenz Theatre in Berlin." He was, however equally grateful to Mr. Sydney Rosenfeld for "colloquial embellishments." Sydney fared just as well as did the real authors of the piece.

To the adapter mere originality is ridiculous and intrusive. Dallying with the wares of other people blinds him to the existence of the other people. He is interested only in his own dallying. He feels that it is a condescension on his part to dally. If he hadn't thought that the wares were worthy, he wouldn't have dallied. Ergo, he discovered their worthiness. Ergo, he is a discoverer, and deserving of prominence.

The adapter sees things that genius has arranged in systematic combinations, and in New York City the man who sees these things first believes innately that he is entitled to all the benefits accruing from them. The more you analyze this state of things, the more monstrous does it seem. I suppose if I went into the adaptation business I should grow callous and indurated, like the other people in it. Just now, however, I can't help blushing at the idea of sticking my own puny little name to the work of original playwrights. It seems to me that I should want to be with the very smallest sort of type. I shouldn't care to pose as the painter of pictures that have been collected and framed by others. The adapter, however, is so greedy.

I suppose that there is some psychological explanation of the reason why brooding over the work of another will make you believe that you are the author of that work. The adapter becomes positively jealous of his source. He grows to hate it. It is fractious if you talk to him of the source. He insinuates that the original exists only for the sake of the parasite. He does all he can to distract your attention from his source. If he can dispose of the disagreeable question with a "from the German," or "suggested by the French," he does so gleefully. Adaptomania is a disease, and a most demoralizing one. It eats into the healthy tissues of truth, and it develops abnormally a man's ego. The adapter, in fact, suffers from hypertrophy of the ego, and nothing is ever done to cure him. He is a peculiar type, and, like an ill-weed, he grows apace. He is offered every inducement to live. He is pampered and petted and lavishly paid, and the result is that he is tightly wedged into our institutions, and as inseparable therefrom as are rats and mice, and other nuisances.

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Messrs. Yarno and Fischer are therefore consigned to a very subordinate position on the programme of the Garden Theatre, and "Al" Neuman emerges from the nonentity's shell over their prostrate bodies. He is very much in evidence as regards the authorship of "His Absent Boy." Perhaps the average audience doesn't care very much who wrote a piece that they have been able to enjoy. The average audience pays much less attention to a theatre programme than you might imagine. I'll bet that the advertisements on the Garden's first page setting forth the glories of a new corset and the magnificence of certain hair ornaments imported from Paris, London and Vienna, received more attention than did the "adapted from the German by Al Neuman."

The new farce turned out to be a somewhat amusing one. It is not another "Too Much Johnson" or "Charley's Aunt," but its idea is good, and it has a first act that is admirable. The notion of an old man imagining a son in order to extort money from a confiding wife is titillating and comparatively novel. And when that trusting wife, turning like the proverbial worm, announces her intention of receiving the aforesaid imaginary son into her own home, the fun waxes fast and furious. There is not a dull moment in the first act of this farce, but there are plenty in the ensuing episodes.

The trouble with Willie Pennie, the central figure of the play, is that he is our tiresome old friend, the ancient rake with the deceived wife. This character, so popular in France and Germany, has been accepted for years in America simply because no native playwright has been able to invent an American substitute. One of these days the gray-haired rose will cease to be amusing and we shall wonder why we ever tolerated him. He exists in farce only. If he bobbed up in drama we should arise in well-bred disgust and remark: "Don't ask us to tolerate such an immoral and disgraceful personage." Yet in farce we are expected to laugh at him, to shriek at the spectacle of his infidelity, to howl at his grandfather's amours and to sympathize with his effort to hoodwink his legitimate.

Of course this is preposterous. Genuine farce should not rely upon a topsy-turvydom of the domestic moralities. Why should a New York audience feel amused when Mr. Pennie, breakfasting in his own house, with his own wife and child, on the morning of his silver wedding, receives a photograph of a skirt dancer, and hides it under his leg? This is in reality a tragedy. By what process of reasoning is it that we have come to look upon it as a delectable farce, as an overweeningly mirth-compelling incident? It is quite foreign to American ideas, which begin (so I have been told by Mr. Daniel Frohman) with a reverence for home, and an adoration of the domestic hearth.

If the tragedy of real life can be used for farce on the stage, why shouldn't the converse of the proposition hold good and the farce of real life be used for tragedy on the stage? At any rate, if we have no right to demand the extermination of the Parisian roue in modern farce on the grounds of morality, we can clamor for it, by reason of its wearisome chestnuttery. I am dead sick of the senile libertine. It is time to call a halt in the parade of grandfathers who are seeking the favors of music hall celebrities. Give the young men a chance, I say.

Besides, in America the Willie Pennies are few and far between. The gray-haired men of this city, toiling and moiling after the immortal dollar, are not disposed to illicit pleasure. Why, therefore, should we have antique reprobates on the American stage simply because they are popular in Paris and Berlin? Isn't it silly when you come to think of it? Isn't it a dire confession of weakness, making the "adapter" a creature of supreme importance, and rendering originality a drug in the market? What an immense amount of labor is expended on the alleged "purification" of Parisian plays for the American stage! And how infinitely better the valuable time thus sacrificed might be used!

And in "His Absent Boy" the silver-haired Pennie is not only a giddy old libertine, but the companion of his illicit festivities is the young man who wants to marry his daughter. The old rake, on the condition that the young man will be silent on the subject of their dual misdoings, sanctions the suit. What he really says is this (these are my words): "If you wont tell my wife what beasts we have been about town, I'll let you marry my daughter."

Don't you think I'm right in suggesting that this sort of thing is tragic rather than comic? It seems outrageous in cold blood to ask us to laugh at such perverted humor. Great Heavens! Isn't there mirth enough in the simplest incidents of life without going for it into the regions of imaginary grand-paternal libertinage? Why, we are simply clogged up with humor. That one line adapted from the German by Al Neuman" is funnier to me than any of Willie Pennie's escapades, while the "colloquial embellishments" of Sydney Rosenfeld are really screamers. The mine of legitimate jocundity is not played out, W. S. Gilbert to the contrary.

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The actresses of this community hate to "make-up" old. It is torture to them. It is a sort of tacit acknowledgment that they have arrived at the "old woman" stage, and they dread it. An actress of sixty-five hasn't the least objection in the world to posing as a soubrette of twenty, but the soubrette of twenty will not reciprocate. Not even art can induce her to do so.

Miss Isabelle Coe, cast as the wife of Willie Pennie in the "Absent Boy," declined to accommodate herself to her surroundings. She put an effective little clot of gray on her hair, and trotted out with no further signs of antiquity. As she was supposed to be a companion picture to Mrs. McKay, the part played by dear old "Aunt" Louisa Eldridge, she might have made up accordingly. It was far easier for Miss Coe to make up old than for Aunt Louisa to make up young. The actress, however, didn't see it in that light, and the entire effect of the second act was spoiled. You saw two women, both supposed to be wives of the same man, one old and one young. Of course, there is no law against an old man marrying a young woman, but in the case of the "Absent Boy" the entire situation in the second act depended for its effect upon the two housewives dramatically brought together. They should both have been middle-aged, aggressive and buxom. Miss Coe is a most agreeable actress. I have always admired her work, and that is why I can't help regretting that she was cast for the role of Mrs. Pennie.

Frederic Bond did really excellent work, and I liked the morose picture presented by Frank Tannehill, Jr. Miss Katherine Grey, whose press agent will probably chronicle the hit of her life, and a re-engagement at a salary of $1,000 a minute, seemed to me to be unsuited to the requirements of farce. If you have got to accept the tragedy of the "Absent Boy" at farce, serious actresses should not be employed. As for Max Figman—well, I hope that by this time he owns new evening clothes. Instead of eating up her diamond garters, as she cheerfully informed us that she did, Miss Sadie Martinot might have bought her hubby a new suit of clothes. Mr. Figman had sat down not wisely, but too well, on his evening trousers, and the effect was incongruous.

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Poor little Pilar Morin! How have the mighty fallen! Imagine stepping from the dainty pedestal she occupied in "L'Enfant Prodigue," to be rudely pilloried in such an absurdity as "Orange Blossoms," at Mr. Doris's Gaiety Theatre. The quaint little pensive woman is to be supremely pitied.

This pantomime, imported from Paris, and, of course, "adapted" for the American stage, makes the usual futile pretense of art, and the dainty Doris has paraphrased its title. He didn't like to call it by its literal name, "The Retiring of the Bride." He was coy and sequestered about it. He dubbed it "Orange Blossoms," and announced that it was highly refined and inordinately delicate. All good boys and girls in this city love the mention of "Orange Blossoms," so sweetly symbolical of fragrant weddings and joyous marriage feasts. The title was a subtle inspiration on the part of Mr. Doris, akin to the inspiration of the dealers in nasty wax works, who advertise that "the proper study of mankind is man," and then proceed to show you all that you want to see of woman. That is one of the trumpery tricks of the trade.

"Orange Blossoms" have nothing whatever to do with "Le Coucher de la Mariee," as presented at the Gaiety Theatre for the delectation of immature boys and undeveloped girls. The whole raison d'etre of the pantomime lies in the disrobing of a bride, the manifestation of her bashful scruples, and the impatience of the newly made husband. There never was a more shameless abuse of artistic privileges than that now before us. I venture to assert that there is not a virgin in this city who could sit through this pantomime without blushing, and I pity the poor little fool who takes his "best girl" to see such a show, lured by its deceptive title and deceived by Mr. Doris's specious announcements. I very rarely visit the playhouses alone, but I thanked my luckless stars that I took nobody to the Gaiety Theatre last Tuesday night.

In a play a bridal chamber is not objectionable. I enjoyed the performance of "Therese Raquin" immensely, and even in "The Ironmaster," as presented by the Kendals, there is more than a suggestion of the nuptial couch. In both cases the playwrights have an object in view. In this pantomime there is no object at all but to grossly stimulate the passions of the uneducated. Mr. Doris's playhouse is not an expensive luxury. Nearly any well appointed boy carries "the price" in his pocket. Before he produced "Orange Blossoms" Doris couldn't drive the deadheads into his theatre. It was almost necessary to pay people to go there. During the past week, however, a filthy entertainment at a cheap price has packed the Gaiety in every direction. It is a pitiful thing. I can't see a redeeming gleam in its opaque disaster. And the worst of it all is that the more it is condemned the more profitable it may be.

I was told that my "roast" last week would simply add to the fever of curiosity, and that silence would have been better. I don't believe it. Let people go and see this pantomime, and reek with it ad nauseam. They will note its purpose exactly. It will put them on their guard, and the rush, under any circumstances, could not last long. There is a limit to all things, and Mr. Doris has overstepped it.

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Oh, women are cheeky creatures. They are. You must admit that they are. They will rule the universe one of these days. See if they don't. I very rarely notice the scores of letters, anonymous and otherwise, that reach me every day, but occasionally some woman crops up who is entitled to the consideration usually accorded to a curio. If they only knew how much fun they gave me, though, they would write even more, bless their hearts! I am going to quote a letter that came from Washington the other day, signed "Adelaide R. Hasse," because its concluding paragraph is so supremely yet unconsciously impertinent.

"Being a student of German, and a believer in human literature," she writes, "Hauptmann included, I resented in no small degree your treatment of this, our youngest writer, in to-day's Journal. Mine is not a national prejudice only, for I have studied Hauptmann for the last year, and I am sorry to see that, because his expression is not in the red, white and blue, it should meet with almost ridicule by American dramatic critics. * * * You say that H. throws pictures of social degradation (sic) at us without any preparation, excuse, or offers of remedy, and later on, cite as an example a 'remedy' from the wandering pen of the extremist Nordau; this remedy being nothing more or less than a few imaginative phrases having about as much bearing on the question of a remedy for the social problem under discussion as the poorest high school debater's harangues. I am convinced that the mistake was made in the beginning, to claim for H. the place of a legitimate dramatist. By that I mean that his dramas belong rather to those bastard dramas which are meant to be read and not produced; one evidence being the detailed descriptive pieces proceding each act, and another, the lack of construction. I notice that the play will be given the first three days of next week, and I shall try very hard to run up to-morrow to see it put on. I will leave my name and number of seat at box office, and if you find it convenient to come around I shall be happy to assure you that it was only my interest in Hauptmann that has prompted me," etc., etc.

Isn't that sublime? Isn't it, really? Imagine throwing all business to the winds, trotting up to the Irving Place Theatre, ferreting out an unknown woman, and remarking bashfully, with thumb in mouth: "If you please, mum, I've come. I'm Alan Dale. Will you kindly assure me that you are interested in Hauptmann?" Ha! Ha! Ha! As I said before, the humor of everyday life is so keen that farce material exists all around us.

Wont some student of feminine apparel who knows all about it tell me what Lillian Russell does to the seams of those marvellously tight white satin knickerbockers that are now starring at Abbey's Theatre in "The Little Duke?" Don't tell me that they are common or garden seams. I wont believe it. No ordinary milliner could build such a pair of white satin continuations for Miss Russell, warranted to dam the avalanche of flesh that is poured into them. Those seams are iron, or plaster, or concrete, or something. They are the most wonderful things that I have ever seen. They hold Miss Russell's chubbyness in the most absolute control. She can walk about the stage without fear of catastrophe, and though I held my breath in startled expectancy once or twice, when she stooped, there was not the least sign of disaster. I want an explanation of it all. I feel that I am too ignorant on the subject.

The years have dealt kindly with Miss Russell's limbs—the same limbs that were used in court when J. C. Duff brought suit against her about a decade ago. Miss Russell has cherished them carefully, and the consequence is that they are almost unique in their pompous superbity. Their return to the stage was the important event of the week just ended. Miss Russell took Bulwer Lytton's advice. She retired her legs from active service the moment after their greatest success. She did not wait until we had grown tired of them. And now in "The Little Duke" she brings them back to us, sleek, glossy and wholesome—scarcely a day older, and scarcely a ton heavier than they used to be.

The new revival appears to have made a hit. It is at any rate a comic opera, one of the good old brands that were popular before we went "Stop Girl" and "Artist Model" crazy. Miss Russell shows us that she is still magnificently fitted for comic opera. Her voice is still in capital condition, and she uses it more skilfully than she used to do. Lillian Russell might have been a Melba or a Nordica with the superb vocal gifts that were lavished upon her. These gifts, however, were never cultivated, and Miss Russell will probably end her career on the comic opera stage. There are one or two numbers in "The Little Duke" that she sings with exquisite taste and discretion, and I am glad to see that she has abandoned the Patti roulade.

There was a time when Lillian had a mania for roulades. She used to ring them in on all occasions. She scrambled up them as a petticoated damsel scrambles up a ladder. Then she occasionally jumped through them as the betarlanted circus rider jumps through the paper hoops. She never attacked them properly. She never interpreted them in a way to please the most casually musical ear. And now, I am pleased to say that she has laid them aside, to confine herself to the vocal pyrotechnics that are within her range.

Miss Russell does better dramatic work in "The Little Duke" than I have seen her do for years. You can't expect her to be skittish. She couldn't wear those white satin knickerbockers if she betrayed the slightest emotion. A vehement sigh might split them irreparably. The prima donna, however, speaks her lines intelligently, looks as though she knew what she was doing, and acts silently while the others are doing their turns.

Messrs. Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau have provided a handsome setting for this Lecocq-Meilhac-Haley opera. It is not as gaudy as some of the frames with which they have surrounded Miss Russell. They have also furnished her with a pleasing company, which would be even better if Lillian were not encumbered with so many sisters and cousins and aunts, anxious to support her, and be themselves supported.

Frederic Solomon is a capital chanoinesse. There have been times when I have cursed the irrepressible buoyancy of this comedian, but he has sat on himself, so to speak, and the rebound does not occur in "The Little Duke." Mr. Solomon is an intelligent person, and a musical person, and he has frittered himself away rather needlessly. He allows us to see his quieter side in his new role, and it is a cheering sight. Mr. Herbert really has more responsibilities than any other member of the cast. He is called upon to jump Miss Russell down from a perch upon which she has established herself in order to speak to her beloved through a transom. Mr. Herbert accomplishes this Sandow-esque feat successfully, and even manages to look as though he didn't mind it very much. Of course it must be a dreadful strain upon the poor fellow. Miss Russell needs men with iron muscles for her comedians.

The other members of this cast are by mildly interesting. Miss Aileen Burt wears her hair as black as ink in order to show up Lillian's golden tresses to advantage, and she does very little else. Miss Suzanne Leonard (please don't forget the "z" and the "nne") is also a member of the company. Her almost tinkling emaciation is amusingly contrasted with that of her sister Lillian. If Miss Russell and Miss Leonard were rolled together and then divided the happy medium would be struck. Nature, however, is either inordinately generous or incomprehensibly niggardly.

ALAN DALE.

SPECIAL AMUSEMENTS.

Attractions Offered in Huber's Museums, Eden Musee and the Ice Palace.

Professor Ferris will to-morrow attempt the feat of placing a subject under hypnotic influence and keeping him in that condition for 168 consecutive hours. Enoch, the man fish, returns, and George, the turtle boy, is retained. Other attractions are Billy Tucker, champion bag puncher; Ernie, one-legged gymnast; Lo Lo, glass dancer, and Daisy Hull, the electric girl. The Big Four Specialty Company will occupy the theatre part. In the Eighth Avenue Museum the attractions include Rider's fire performers, Michaels, the strong man; Mazzochi's performing birds, Olga, the Grecian beauty, and a select vaudeville company in the theatre.

The Cabaret du Neant, in the Casino Chambers, is really a pleasant place to visit, notwithstanding the sombre attractions. It is a novelty that is very much appreciated.

Mr. Croker in wax is a great object of interest to the patrons of the Eden Musee. The concerts given daily add much to the attractiveness of the place.

It is a question of only a short time now when the people will go to the Ice Palace, on Lexington avenue, to get cool. The weather has no effect on the ice, and good skating is always to be had.

The seventh of the series of Graham concerts will be held in the Academy of Music this evening. A strong list of attractions will be presented, among whom are the following stars and artists: Maggie Cline, J. W. Kelly, William Jerome, Alice Johnson, Carr and Jordan, Benjamin R. Harney, Maud Nugent, Mays and Hunter, Beasey family, William Scott and Paul Craft.