

Mrs. Fiske in a New Play

By JULES ECKERT GOODMAN.

(From The Journal's Own Correspondent.)

NEW YORK, Dec. 16.—Of all the periods in the theatrical year, the Christmas season is the most important. It is, as it were, a breathing place in the midst of the year which, immediately after the 25th, begins with new vigor and activity. Already for the days just preceding and following Christmas there is announcement of a half dozen or more openings of the first order. Meanwhile, though there is not an absolute dearth, there is not a superabundance of new material.

The present week has given exactly one novelty, unless the revival of "Othello" by Robert Mantell might be so termed. Last Monday night Mrs. Fiske produced her first new play in two years and has scored unambiguously a hit, not merely an artistic success but as far as signs of knowledge a popular one. And he ever mindful that there is a vast difference between these two kinds of success and that there are no ways complimentary.

The play presented by Mrs. Fiske bears the euphonious name of "Leah Kleehna," and is the work of C. M. McLellan, better known as Hugo Mor- ton, author of "The Belle of New York." The piece is highly original and in its outlines attractive. It tells at bottom a story of great and vital interest. It possesses many elements of freshness and power, and is in spite of all its virtues, it is nevertheless not in any sense of the word a great play. It is a most tantalizing play, too good to be called a melodrama, and not good enough to be called a splendid study of criminality.

Daughter of a Thief.

Leah Kleehna is the daughter of a clever thief. Her mother dying when she was very young, her father has undertaken her education. This education has proved of a highly specialized nature; in a word, he has taught her his own business and made a thief of her. Everything goes on beautifully until one day, when in a man comes into Leah's life. Almost for the first time her dormant conscience springs awake and the knowledge of the life she is leading comes to her.

At this moment her father has planned a big robbery at the home of Paul Sylvaine. Sylvaine is a man of theories, the most advanced of his own kind, and Leah is a woman of a nature only separated from non-criminal nature by an idea, and that the idea may be imparted by one mind to another.

In other words, he would reclaim criminals by an appeal to their better nature rather than by prison and punishment. Though Leah is not aware of it at the time, Sylvaine is the man whom she has seen and loved without knowing who he was. All she knows is that he is engaged to a young girl, Claire Barton, a sister of Raoul Barton, a cad and a brute who has tried to bargain for her with her father. She has thus a powerful weapon in case she is caught whereby she can defend herself.

A second act finds her in Sylvaine's house at night, trying to rob the safe. She is caught by Sylvaine and at once plays her trump card. She tells him that she knows that he is engaged, that if he tries to arrest her she will claim that he himself had brought her into the house and then when he found her stealing ordered her to do so.

He answers by questioning her about her life, delving at it were for her soul. Then she breaks down and cries and Sylvaine realizes that at last he has found the one who has been added to his content of good in the criminal classes.

An Exciting Climax.

Just then singing and shouting are heard in the garden below and Raoul, tipsy and returning from a masquerade, climbs over the balcony. Sylvaine quickly conceals Leah in a side room, handkerchief and in drunken taunts Raoul discovers on the floor a woman's menses a dart into the room where Leah has gone and discovers her. Furious now he comes out and threatens Sylvaine, when Leah tells the whole story and Leah turns again to Sylvaine and asks him what he intends to do with her.

"Here we are," she says, "a gentleman, a blackguard and a thief. What are you going to do?"

He answers that he intends to let her go. Immediately she makes a movement toward the balcony to go out in the same manner that she had entered, but Sylvaine seizes her from the front, and as he would a guest. Raoul left alone for a moment mumbles to himself that now the woman is in his power. Then he suddenly thinks of the jewels. His hand fumbles over the case and at last he abstracts them and puts them in his pocket. Sylvaine returns. Raoul says good night. Sylvaine looks for the jewels and finds them gone. For just a moment a suspicious dart into his head that Leah has taken them. The next minute the truth has dawned on him.

The third act resumes the following morning. Sylvaine refuses to prosecute the girl much to the disgust of his future father-in-law, General Barton. Instead, he summons the girl. Leah comes and is interviewed by Sylvaine in the presence of General Barton. The latter, all angry at her replies, goes out to call an officer. Sylvaine questions Leah, learns that she did not take the jewels and finds that his suspicions against Raoul are just. At the same time Leah jumps to the same conclusion, but Sylvaine tells her that she mustn't mention her feelings in the presence of the general. The general returns with the officer. Sylvaine tries to dissuade him from causing Leah to be sent to jail to do so, he is forced to hint at the truth. Then, just as Raoul enters, the general orders the officer sent away.

A Conventional Ending.

The scene shifts back to Leah's home in the fourth act. All day she has been thinking and Kleehna fears that she has been taken by the police. At last she

comes. Asked where she had been, she answers, "Walking the streets . . . by the river." There is a new manner about her which Kleehna is not slow to see. What this new manner means soon develops when she tells her father that she is going away from him. For answer Kleehna locks the door and demands that she promise to go with him. Again comes Raoul, who this time is being followed by a detective. He confesses what he has done and offers to save him. Kleehna, in spite of the urging of Leah and his pal, accepts and says that all four will now go away together. Leah again refuses to go with her father. Threateningly Kleehna goes toward her, when she draws a pistol as he thinks on him, but really to end her own life. At that moment a friend of Leah's is heard calling below and Leah goes out on to the balcony. The friend says that there is a detective below; Leah now threatens to tell the detective all unless her father will let her go. Kleehna has the door unlocked and Leah presses out.

The last act finds Leah in the lettuce fields in Austria working like an ordinary peasant. Hither comes Sylvaine and tells her that he is no longer engaged, and the ending is as conventional as any matinee girl could wish.

A Bit Biographical.

There is no doubt that this play handles an interesting theme of importance and vitality. There is no question that the elements of a great play are here. But its treatment should be different and more logical and consistent. More than that half, to some of us the more interesting and meaningful half of the story "left up in the air." What becomes of Kleehna and what becomes of Raoul we never know. Moreover the idea of Sylvaine eventually marrying Leah is not altogether pleasant.

The play is one based on the regeneration of a human being, a woman. This very fact and the vague similarity between the heroine's rescue a reminiscence of Tolstoy's "Resurrection," which Miss Blanche Walsh played last season. Placed beside the Tolstoy play, "Leah Kleehna" is found almost trivial as far as serious purpose goes. Of course Maalova was a far different creature than Leah, and the circumstances of her sin were vastly different. Still in Maalova you could see the gradual awakening of self-respect, the deep, hidden goodness coming again to the surface. You do not feel this in Leah. When you first see her her regeneration has already begun; yet, in spite of Mrs. Fiske's splendid natural acting, her change seems almost impulsive.

The play has thus undoubted flaws. But on the other hand, it has action and interest. It is one of the most popular things that I can recall having seen this remarkable actress produce. By its tokens possible, this play is a certain sort of a long run, and deservedly. In the first place, imperfect as it is, it is far above the ordinary, and possesses some lines of beauty and cleverness. It is probably this that makes the play so hard to classify. Moreover it is brilliantly acted by one of the finest casts seen in years in one production. Mr. John Mason as Sylvaine brought out all the manliness and strength of that character and as a result he is the most convincing portrayal. Mr. George Arliss of the "blackguard" Raoul added another splendid portrait to that exquisite gallery which this consummate artist has given us these many years. An English actor, Charles Cartwright, made of Kleehna a living model of the acute criminal. As for Mrs. Fiske, she showed again how wonderful she is, how much she has to do in a certain sort of acting. Leah Kleehna is not one of her finest bits of characterization, but it is one of the most effective that she has given us. Mention, too, should be made of the mounting of the lettuce fields, was charming, and won no small amount of applause. "Leah Kleehna" is a play that will doubtless be much talked about and be well patronized.

A Biblical Tragedy.

I was unable last week to give space to a production really worthy of more extended notice than is even at my disposal. Monday a week ago Miss Nance O'Neill presented Thomas Bailey Aldrich's poetic biblical tragedy, "Judith of Bethulia." When I went last Saturday matinee there was a bare handful of people present, which may be accounted for by the fact that the weather was stormy or that it was a matinee or that the holiday season is approaching. The play has been seen by many of our extended notice than is even at my disposal. Monday a week ago Miss Nance O'Neill presented Thomas Bailey Aldrich's poetic biblical tragedy, "Judith of Bethulia." When I went last Saturday matinee there was a bare handful of people present, which may be accounted for by the fact that the weather was stormy or that it was a matinee or that the holiday season is approaching.

There are many good things that one might say concerning Mr. Aldrich's play. First and foremost, he deserves credit for making the action quick and direct instead of expatiating. On the other hand, the struggle which must underlie every drama is not clearly brought out. If the love motif between Archier and Judith or between Judith and Holoferne had been more accentuated the play would have been stronger and more convincing. As it is, it is more narrative with spots of the dramatic than truly dramatic throughout. Take, for example, "Mary of Magdala," which Mrs. Fiske produced. Heyse was clever enough to see that his love motif between the Magdalen and Judas must be presented at once. Mr. Aldrich starts out to do this, and then when he reaches the most vital part switches his theme. Still even at that the play holds and in places grips.

A Bit of "Judith."

As for the verse, it is marked at times by beauty and distinction. Perhaps an example will not be amiss. The following is Judith's recital of the vision that came to her:

As I sat alone
Within the tower, alone yet not alone,
A strange silence fell upon the land;
Like to a sea-mist stretching east and west
It spread and close on this there came a sound
Of snow-dart plumage rustling in the dark.

And voices that such magic whisperings made
As the sea makes at twilight on a strip
Of sand and pebble. Suddenly I saw—
Look, look, Oslas Charmis, Chabris, look!

See ye not, yonder, a white mailed hand
That with levelled finger points through air?
See, it still lingers, like a silver mist!
It changes, fades, and then comes back again.

And now 'tis ruby red—as red as blood!
'Tis gone! Fear not. It was a sign to me.
To me alone. Oslas didst thou note
The way it pointed? To the eastern gate.

As for the acting, the role of Judith is by far the best bit of work that Miss O'Neill has shown us. It is admirably adapted to her personality and gives opportunity for the display of power and strength. Moreover the character is conceived broadly and the finer

nuances are not necessary to a well rounded characterization. Power and intensity Miss O'Neill exhibits, and here there are shown, too, subtlety and finesse. The play is more than worth seeing, and again credit is due to Miss O'Neill for presenting dramas of such high standing.

At the Theatres

(Continued from Page Seventeen.)

11 years. "Yon Yonson" himself is a quiet, inoffensive Swede, whom one meets every day in the western cities of this country. Although he is peculiar of speech and awkward in movement, his heart is in the right place; his fidelity to friends unquestionable, and his honesty unshakable as the rock of Gibraltar. The other members of the company have been recruited from the best professionals obtainable. Manager P. J. Kennedy has re-engaged the famous original "Lumbermen's Quartet," which sings the Swedish folk songs in a manner that is unequalled in their own country.

"For Mother's Sake" at Empire.

"For Mother's Sake," with dainty Marie Heath as the star, was quietly launched at the opening of the season in Chicago, without any waving of flags or firing of journalistic cannons, depending entirely upon its merits as a play for its measure of success or failure. That it made an emphatic hit the Chicago press record. After the Chicago run it started on its way to the coast, but long before the shores of the Pacific were in sight its fame preceded it, and crowded houses greeted it everywhere on its western tour. It tells a story straight, direct and natural, unmitigated with deep-dyed villains whose hands are dripping with human blood, whose pockets are bulging with mortgages, of fallen women with "sassy" overdrawn country caricature. It is a perfect page from life, whose every speech rings true, an unvarnished picture of just plain folk; a play whose situations are so rural, whose so-called embellishments so true to nature that you forget you are gazing at a play and imagine you are looking upon a bit of real life. Such a play is "For Mother's Sake," and that it will continue to draw the amusement-loving thousands for years to come is a foregone conclusion.

This mammoth production, in its entirety, will hold the stage of the Empire theatre three nights of this week, starting Thursday, with the regular matinee Saturday.

Eastern Success for Next Week.

B. C. Whitney's production of the great success, "The Show Girl," or "The Magic Cap," a musical comedy in two acts, comes to the Empire theatre on Tuesday next. The company includes Hilda Thomas, Sam Mylie, Sid Forrester, Lou Hall, Josephine Floyd, Charles Haigh, Charles E. Farcor, Elizabeth Bird, Bert Wainwright, May New York, Miss Blanche Walsh, Isabel Foot, Nellie Dowdell, Susette Beatty, Elizabeth Thomas, Camille Astor, Leona Burns, Nellie Wilson, Ida Scott, Vera Pinder and others, also 30 singing and dancing girls.

Bijou's Christmas Bill.

The Bijou management wants every one in the city to have a good time today. It's "Merry Christmas," the right time for pleasure. The shows today will be exceptionally good, and tomorrow begins another big holiday program.

May and Miles bring to the Bijou that famous travesty sketch of theirs, "Seeing Things." It's full of songs and dances that go right to the fun center. Welch and Moore come from New York with their top line acrobatic and contortion performance. Don't confound these specialists with most of their kind. They are in another class altogether.

"The trials and troubles of an automobilist" is the name of a particularly happy film for the Bijougraph, which has been secured for the week. "A Chinaman's acrobatic quest" is another. Pearl Grayson has one of those illustrated songs which have made her famous. Florence Morrell, the musical danseuse, should go on the top line. She's really the finest dancer who ever trod the Bijou boards, and that is saying a good deal, as any patron will testify. Every afternoon and evening during the week. Continuous today, "Merry Christmas," again.

Holiday Bill at the Star.

Christmas bells will chime merrily at the Star theatre today, and the program will be continuous from 2 to 10:30 p. m. There is no merrier place on earth than the Star theatre, and a program in keeping with the glad season is on.

Tomorrow is a legal holiday, and the bill will also be continuous from 2 to 10:30 p. m. The best acts obtainable have been engaged for Christmas week. The headliner is the brilliant London sourette, Daisy Harcourt, who opens the week with an entirely new act. Miss Harcourt is a London favorite, and her engagement last week shows that she is already a Portland favorite, and her title, "the greatest female mimic in the world," will not be questioned. The "Fanny" family of marvelous acrobats is another attractive combination, with an act full of spectacular feats. Ellis and Paloma are high-class sketch artists and duettists. Montgomery and Cantor are the kings of the vaudeville. The Delkes are renowned as sketch artists and eccentric dancers. Arthur Lane, a talented singer, has a new pictured ballad. The projectoscope with new moving pictures closes the great bill.

The Arcade's Christmas Offering.

Today and tomorrow will be merry days at the Arcade theatre, for the bill is continuous from 2 to 10:30 p. m., and the program has been selected with special reference to the Christmas season. Today little Fern Hart and the rest of the star acts of the present bill will appear for the last time. Tomorrow at 2 p. m. the new Christmas bill will start.

Headling the new bill are the Waldron Bros., German comedians, whose songs and dances have the genuine Teutonic flavor. Dan and Bessie Kelly, known in all the large vaudeville theatres as laugh-producers, add a merry element to the bill. Sylvan and O'Neill are the latest stars to enter the popular field of the comedy sketch, introducing clever acrobatic feats. Lolis Mendenhall, the brilliant violin virtuoso, is a performer whom any far-sighted manager would welcome as the secure dancing gowns, and her playing will demonstrate that she is a perfect mistress of the violin. Genevieve Ardell, a pretty singer of illustrated songs, and the American bioscope, with new moving pictures, and a bill that is remarkable for its variety and novelty.

Baker Holiday Bill.

Not to be outdone this week the Baker has got together a great bill for the week. The very best high-class talent that could be procured has been engaged and one of the best in the history of the house is on for the week. The list is headed by the Manning trio, comedy sketch; the Oxford duo, club jugglers; Bimm, Bomm, B-r-r-r, the original novelty musical team; J. J.

In Holiday Attire.

The Lyric has on its holiday attire this week and announces one of the best bills since the opening of this popular family vaudeville house. In addition to the regular attractions, Friday night, as usual, they will give away \$5 in gold overbook the Baker in your Christmas rounds this week. You'll find enjoyment to your liking in plenty.

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Columbia Theatre

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