

Latest Play by Eugene Walter Has Taken Skeptic New York by Storm

"The Easiest Way" Is Regarded as One of the Most Daring Theatrical Productions of Recent Years—The Plot.

NEW YORK, Feb. 1.—(Special Correspondence.)—Nothing in theatrical circles has made so much stir as "The Easiest Way," another play by Eugene Walter, who first came into prominence through "Paid in Full," which he followed by "The Wolf," which did not achieve the success of the first. "The Easiest Way," with Frances Starr in the principal role, gives promise already from the second night of surpassing the success of the first.

The first impression of the play is that nothing more daring has ever been put upon a stage, and as time goes on, one marvels at the audacity shown in writing or producing this remarkable play, but it draws with pitiless accuracy a side of life long needed to be understood by everyone, yet hidden by that peculiar psychological curtain which may be called non-realization. We hear things which should shock us, but which, yet there is only sympathy and interest in unfolding the terrible story, one which hangs over not only women who figure upon a stage career, but over all women thrown upon the world, wherein they must make a living.

"The Easiest Way," at the Stuyvesant Theatre, is a play that all mothers should see, although it is hardly one to which one would feel like taking one's mother. It is good for fathers to see; it is good for pitiless society women to see; it is good for young girls to see; it is good for young men to see; it is good for old men to see; it is good for the whole world to see—and it is certainly the broadest play that Broadway has seen in a very long time.

Strongly Drawn Character.

If we are to accept Miss Starr's delineation of Laura Murdoch, a young actress, who depends upon the bounty of a Wall Street broker, Willard Brockton, not only for her position with the theatrical company, but also for her home, her luxuries and for all else, we are not facing a depraved woman, but a very sweet and refined one who, while playing for a summer rest, while playing with a stock company in that city is thrown into the company of a young reporter with whom she falls sincerely and desperately in love.

Brockton comes to join her on her way back to New York and he is told of the situation. The young man is hoping to make his way, but naturally Brockton does not put very much faith in his chances to "make good." Laura pleads with him to release her, that she may become the honest wife of the man for whom she believes herself willing to endure any hardship which may come from her struggle to get a position on her own merits, which may or may not be very great. Nor can one feel that Brockton is an altogether despicable character. On the contrary, he seems quite the opposite and gives the impression of having a chance to lead a straight life by himself, but he informs John Madison that when she will tire of it and return to him, he will be ready to take her back to New York. But Brockton is not a philanthropist, neither are other men philanthropists. He might have made the way easier at least.

Why should he? Mr. Walter was probably drawing the truth, and women have found that the "philanthropist" is not standing at the ready to help poor, but worthy or talented young women when there is no expectation of returned favors.

Suffers Many Hardships.

When next we find Laura Murdoch, she is at the end of every resource known. Her miserable room in a cheap theatrical boarding-house is appalling in its squalor, her meal consists of a bottle of milk and a couple of crackers. Her faith is still beautiful and her love is unfaded, the maid brings her a letter, one such as she receives daily. Hopeful and full of love, but not even a penny for stamps left. The girl has no possible chance for making her own way, and she is in a dilemma, she has been refused and not exactly refused, but put off from day to day in every theatrical agency in the city. She has exhausted every resource, and she is no longer the question of love of ease or fineries or anything so frivolous as that. The colored maid informs her that the "colored weeks" are past, and that the landlady has to meet her bills and is being pushed to the limit. She has no chance, there is no chance, she has exhausted every resource, and she can live on milk and crackers but where to go, where to find a roof to cover her?

When Extremes Meet.

At this moment Edie St. Clair, an actress who has not found it necessary to work at her profession as chorus girl for over a year comes to visit her. Dejected as her condition may seem, she is giving as they may be, they are filled with the horrid truths that go to make up not only this play, but also life itself. "Do you get those letters from him often?" she asks Laura whose love is still shining in her eyes.

"Every day," she answers.

"Does he say anything?" comes the brutal question.

"Nothing," answers the girl, "he does not know, I have never told him."

At this point, the play is at its height in the mail every Saturday night, there's a new look on the door Sunday morning.

While she is there the maid comes again and for the matter with extra warmth because there is a well-dressed woman visiting the girl. Laura pushed to the last of her strength pleads with her friend for enough money to pay her rent at which the woman cries:

"What? You want to do the angel act, and be so good and pure, and you are willing to take my money to help me out?" You know where my money comes from, and you know that the minute you get ready to let Brockton know he will help you out.

This is the end of the matter from the hand-organ outside is grinding the tune of the dance hall or of the free-and-easy restaurant in a powerful psychological point by the way she consents—and the end is in sight.

This is not the yielding of a woman to temptation. Whoever interprets the play this way knows nothing of the struggle of a woman with the world. This is the only alternative between life and death, and she proves later that she has not the courage to put a bullet through her brain.

Hopelessness the Keynote.

And here a distinct line must be drawn to define the cowardice and deception which she shows later and the weakness through which she fell back into the old life. Her yielding to the present state of affairs is due to the weakness of a woman. Hopelessness is the keynote. The situation was hopeless beyond the possibility of any human being. A woman does not think about begging from door to door. Let such a one try to get a position as cook or as nurse maid, and see whether she will be any more fortunate. She is marked as belonging to another class of work. She is refused in appearance in manner and must face the thing squarely. She is not a depraved woman, she is not a depraved woman, but what could save her?

A few months later Brockton reads in the morning paper nothing of the struggle of a woman with the world. He has struck it rich and is on his way to New York. At the same time Laura receives a telegram which she tries to conceal from him. She has always been reliable, truthful and honest—these were the qualities that most recommended her to the man who in general "did not take his women seriously." No more truth, only lies and deception which began when she destroyed the letter dictated to her by Brockton who told Madison that when



FRANCES STARR, LEADING WOMAN IN "THE EASIEST WAY."

she came back he would write and tell him of it. But these lies, this insincerity, they were the last cry of a hungry heart for the honest love of the man that she loved. When he found that for the second time she had wandered from the straight and narrow path that men seem to think is the bed of roses for women he left her. Just a moment she feels strong enough to do the brave thing. The voice of her hand, but she cannot—

The Parting of the Ways.

"Annie," she shrieks, "Annie, get me the handkerchief and the best looking hat—I'm going to Rector's!" In other words to hell.

There are only six people in the cast.

Early Navigation of Columbia by Pioneer Steamboat Man

How Traffic Was Conducted on This Historic Waterway Before the Railroads Became Carriers.

Columbia Journal of Commerce.

THE earliest account I have seen of navigation of the Columbia and Snake rivers, is in a diary written by my father, W. H. Gray, in 1856.

He tells of starting in a canoe with two Nez Perce Indians in December of that year from the mouth of the "Koon-kia" (now Clearmont River), going down the Snake, encountering an ice jam near the mouth of the Palouse River, portaging their canoe around the jam and proceeding down the Columbia, leaving the canoe at Hudson Bay Fort at the mouth of Walla Walla River, and walked to Walla Walla (now Whitman Station on the O. R. & N.) to consult with Dr. Whitman. Returning, they went on down the Columbia, portaging around Tumwater (now Cello Falls), but rode through the dunes in their canoe.

He describes the dunes as "A rolling, rolling, rolling mass of waters that tossed our canoe around like a chip, over which the Indians had wonderful control; and it was when we were thrown into the still waters below."

In writing of the Cascades, he says: "After breakfast this morning we went through the Cascade Rapids. After passing through the swift water, the bed began to blow, and we made camp near a large rock several hundred feet high (Castle Rock), and were two days more reaching Fort Vancouver." His Indians must have been expert canoeists and wanted to try the white man's nerve.

The up trip was made in a Hudson Bay batteau as far as Port Walla (now Old Wallula), and the diary carries him back overland to New York. Twenty years later the Cayuse war brought troops, and boating by white men was begun on the river. Sailing sloops and schooners were operated successfully between the mouth of the Deschutes River and Wallula. These vessels increased in size, and in 1861 there were several schooners capable of carrying from 40 to 50 tons each plying on the river.

First Steamboat in 1858.

In 1858, upon the advice of some of the old-time captains, the men who had the contract for carrying the Government freight from Fort Vancouver to the posts east of the mountains built the first steamboat to operate above Cello Falls. She was built at the mouth of Deschutes River and christened the "Col. Wright"—after the famous Indian fighter who stopped several thousand Indian horses on Spokane Prairie near the present site of the City of Spokane. This craft was a flat-bottom sternwheeler, with an open hull, a half deck and cabin above.

A man from Mississippi with a capital of \$10,000 was invited to become a stockholder and manage the steamboat. He rode on horseback to John Day Rapids, 10 miles above Deschutes, and upon examination declared that a steamboat could never be navigated up or down through those rapids, and declined to invest. It was known that sloops and schooners could go up over the rapids when the summer gales were blowing, so a mast and sail were installed in the col. Wright, to help her over the rapids in case the steam failed. The sail was a great help in straight river, but a nuisance in the rapids and bends.

She was a success from the first, especially financially. The contractors received \$100 per ton measurement for freight, and the little Col. Wright, whose full carrying capacity was about 100 tons weight, has the record for carrying the greatest number of tons

but they are artists, and in their hands "The Easiest Way" will probably fill the theater for a very long period. The enthusiasm was enormous, and there were certain calls for Mr. Walter and for Mr. Belasco, both of whom were forced into speech making. Miss Starr surprised those who had the greatest expectations for her, and as Brockton, Joseph Kilgour did an exceptionally clever piece of characterization as did Laura Nelson Hall as Edie St. Clair and Emma Dunn as a colored maid. William Sampson is an impoverished manager and Edward Robins as John Madison, the young reporter, were quite as efficient as the other members of the cast. EMILIE FRANCES HAUER.

Boating Under Difficulties.

In the winter of '60-'61 my father built a boat 21 feet long and 12 feet beam, at Osoyoos Lake, the head of the Okanogan River, with the intention of taking it to the mouth of the Deschutes River, putting in the machinery and bringing freight up the river to Kettle River mines, which were then considered rich. We whipsawed the lumber, paid one dollar a pound to have necessary iron packed over the mountains in mid-winter from Port Hope, British Columbia. Made trails or wooden pins for nails and spikes. Made skum for caulking from wild flax and pitch from gum picked up under the pine trees. The boat was ready when the ice melted in the lake, and started down the river on May 10, 1861.

Arriving without mishap at Deschutes the Columbia River by a sternwheeler steamboat.

High Finance in Those Days.

The United States Quartermaster had a large number of Army wagons for the troops at the different posts. Before taking the wagons on the boat the tongue was placed in position, the bows for the cover set up and the feed buckets hung on behind. A measurement was then taken from the ground to the top of the cover, from the edge of the tongue to back of the buckets and from the outside of the hub of one

hind wheel to the outside of the hub of the other and the measurement computed into tons of 40 feet each. The wagons were then knocked down and stowed aboard the boat. On that trip the boat carried something over 300 tons. This matter of high finance seemed to be highly appreciated by the head army officials as the officer that approved the accounts, died a few years ago a retired Quartermaster-General.

In 1862 there were plying on the river above Cello Falls:

Steamers—
Col. White, 100 tons capacity.
Tenino, 150 tons.
Okanogan, 150 tons.
Nez Perce Chief, 35 tons.
Owyhee, 135 tons.
Yakima, 200 tons.
Wahfoot, 200 tons.
Spray, 125 tons.
Kyus, 150 tons.
Cascadia, 50 tons.
Lewisston, 30 tons, built at Umatilla.
Schooners—
James Buchanan, 50 tons capacity.
Hunting Bear, 40 tons.
Victorine, 50 tons.
Schooner owned by Torrence Quinn, 50 tons.
Sloops—
Mount Hood, 60 tons capacity.
Sarah F. Gray, 40 tons.

Fuel Greatest Problem.

The greatest problem to be solved in the navigation of the river was to secure fuel for the steamboats. There was not a tree more than six inches in diameter and very few of those growing on the banks of the Columbia between Deschutes Falls and Priest Rapids. On Snake River there was one pine tree on the south bank of the river, 40 miles above the mouth, which gave a name to the rapids at that point. There were three pine trees just below Almo Creek, and ten near what is known as Little Pine Tree Rapids, 14 miles below Lewisston. There was considerable driftwood scattered along the banks which was cut by the Indians and white men and sold to the steamboats at \$10 and \$12 per cord. This supply of drift was partially renewed by the freshets every summer, but not to a satisfactory extent. There was a small forest of pine and tamarac timber growing at the head of the Kilkilt Valley which sloped to the north away from the river. The south or river end of the valley ended abruptly on top of a mountain 200 feet high.

In the winter of '61 and '62 the Oregon Steam Navigation Company (or the O. S. N., as we knew it) contracted with R. Mallory & Company to purchase 500 cords of wood on the banks of the Columbia at or near John Day Rapids, at \$15 per cord. The timber was cut in the Kilkilt Valley, hauled to the brink of the mountain and rolled down 200 feet to the bank of the river and split into cordwood. Even this auxiliary to the driftwood was not enough to keep the boats running, and the company was forced to haul the driftwood to the Dalles, hauled by wagon 15 miles to the Deschutes and delivered to the steamboats.

I believe the first steamboat to navigate Snake River was the Col. Wright. She carried a big load of Government freight to the mouth of the Palouse River in the summer of 1860.

Freight Between Two Corporations.

In 1862 three independent steamboats were built at Columbus. The Spray, by Captain A. P. Ankony, Billy Gates and Billy Parsons; the Kyus, by Captain Len White, first-class stevedore, and Captain Butts, a crank on phonetic spelling, and the Cascadia, by Captain W. H. Gray. In the spring of 1863 the People's Transportation Company, which was operating a line of steamers on the Willamette River from Portland up to the mouth of the Columbia, realized that the development of the mines east of the Cascades had created a valuable traffic on the Columbia River. They built the Iris to ply between the Upper Cascades and the Dalles, and formed a combination with the owners of the Spray and the Kyus, to operate a line through to Lewiston, Idaho. A lively opposition was inaugurated. 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