



Girls of the Chorus in "Somewhere Else," a New Musical Comedy.

PLAYS OF THE NEW YEAR

Including a Bible Play, a Fairy Play and a Children's Theatre

By J. E. WEBBER

PLAYS based on the "inspired word" have not always been inspired works of art. Frequently they have failed to qualify either as entertainment or drama and, at times lacking in sincerity, they have, moreover, tended to shock the reverent in mood. "Joseph and His Brethren" is a happy exception to all these experiences. Out of the rich, colourful material to be found in the sacred narrative of "the dreamer," Mr. Louis N. Parker, author of "Disraeli," "Pomander Walk," and "Drake," has written a beautifully impressive pageant play, which the Liebler Co. have mounted with a prodigality that by comparison at least dwarfs either "The Garden of Allah" or "The Daughter of Heaven," which preceded it, at the Century Theatre. The play follows for the most part the Old Testament narrative, the action proceeding from the tents of Schehem, where we find Jacob rejoicing in the majority of his last born child, Joseph, son of Rachel, and where he presents him with the "coat of many colours," while the brothers stand by bitter and envious of the favours shown him. The scenes which follow are "The Wells of Dothan," "Jacob's Tent," "The House of Potiphar," "Potiphar's Garden," "Zuleika's Room," "The Prison," "Pharaoh's Palace," "The Pyramid" and "Joseph's House." Liberties, of course, have been taken, such as the entirely apocryphal adventures of Zuleika and the amplification of certain episodes, or, as Mr. Parker prefers to put it, "episodes are continued which in the story are left unfinished as not bearing on the central figure."

The Children's Theatre is built atop the Century, once the New Theatre, and fulfils a plan which that

unfortunate enterprise had in contemplation. This tiny playhouse is also said to be the only institution of its kind in the world—a distinction many will contemplate with mixed emotions. Only in a prodigiously wealthy American city like New York would such luxurious provision for the entertainment of children be thought of, perhaps. And only under the conditions of *ennui*, to which such surroundings predispose youth, could children be found sufficiently unimaginative enough to need it. The imagination of children within the experience of most of us, at least, has always been sufficient to create its own illusions, without any assistance from stage carpenters or wig-makers. And for that matter so was that of grown-ups not longer ago than Elizabethan days. But the children's theatre is here, along with a new generation of children, and



Frank Losie as Potiphar, and Pauline Frederick, Potiphar's Wife, in "Joseph and His Brethren"—the Great Biblical Dramatic Spectacle, now running at the Century Theatre, New York.

it were well, perhaps, to ponder the lesson of "Milestones" before withholding a welcome to either. One cynical observation, however, we may not resist: with a theatre for children an established fact, a theatre for grown-ups may not prove such an unreasonable expectation.

"Racketty-Packetty House," by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of "Little Lord Fauntleroy," as every one knows, is the opening attraction for this little theatre. It is a story about dolls, about the way dolls think and act and speak when no one is looking at them. For, contrary to general opinion, dolls can do these things and have all sorts of fun, provided they are unobserved. If any one looks,

however, they stop. Fairies know this, for of course fairies visit dolls' houses—that is, when dolls are agreeable and nice, not, however, when they are proud or bad-tempered. Performances take place every afternoon at four o'clock, and on Saturdays at ten a.m., in addition.

"A GOOD LITTLE DEVIL" is the name of the fairy play which Mr. Belasco has provided for grown-up folks. It has been adapted by Austin Strong from a fairy play which Madame Rostand and her son Maurice played in Paris some years ago. Here is the story: Once upon a time there lived in the northern part of Scotland a little boy whose aunt made him live in a garret with the rats. She starved him and clad him in rags, while all the time hoarding up money sent her by a rich uncle for his bringing up. But the fairies intervened, and one night when he was sent to bed, supperless, they came to his garret bringing little Thoughts-from-afar who had seen his mother in heaven. She brought three kisses for him, one for memory, one for love, and one for courage. Equipped with these and befriended by a wandering poet, the boy, who proved always a "good little devil," has many experiences and adventures in the real world. Finally, having been tested and tried, he comes home to the garden of his blind little sweetheart to find that the fairies have restored her sight. Then everyone gets his deserts. The wicked are punished, the virtuous rewarded, the boy marries his sweetheart and both live happy ever after. Mr. Belasco has shown his customary skill in producing a perfect illusion of fairy land.

THE popularity of crook plays was again manifested in the selection of "Blackbirds," a comedy in three acts by Harry James Smith, having for its foundation a plan to steal a valuable prayer rug



Janet Beecher as the Hon. Mrs. Boyle, and Cyril Scott as Hon. Gerald Boyle, in "The Woman Of It."

from the home of a Detroit millionaire. The actual exchange of a counterfeit rug for the original is entrusted to a young woman who has shown rare coolness in smuggling jewels past the U. S. customs authorities. The scheme is spoiled by her superstition, a fatal weakness in a law breaker, an old woman warning her that the rug has been sacred for 300 years and that anyone who steals it will bring bad luck upon herself and those she loves. The piece is written in a vein of whimsical humour, with the leading role entrusted to that excellent comedienne, Laura Hope Crews, assisted by H. B. Warner, of "Alias Jimmy Valentine" fame.

"FINE FEATHERS," which comes to New York after a long and successful run in Chicago, also deals in crime. The story is that of a young wife living humbly on her husband's meagre salary at first, but, developing a longing for finer dress and richer living, she urges her husband to lend his services to a deal which he knows to be dishonest, but which holds the promise of a goodly fortune. The action of the play deals with the tragic consequences that follow.

THE plot of "The Spy," adapted from French sources and played in London last season under the title of "The Turning Point," turns upon the renewal of conjugal love in an estranged wife, when she hears that her husband has just strangled the man who had assailed his military honour. The



THE WEDDING OF THE DOLLS.

Master Gabriel as Peter Piper, and Baby Esmond as Lady Patricia in "Racketty-Packetty House," a Play for Children, Given in the Children's Theatre, New York.