

MUSIC AND PLAYS

Fat Falstaff, said by a Canadian University Professor to be the most intellectual character in Shakespeare, convulses Canadian audiences in an up-to-date farce. New Italian opera premiere at the Metropolitan Friday last.

FAT old Falstaff held down the boards at the Royal Alexandra, Toronto, all last week. With him were Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Justice Shallow, Master Slender, Mistress Ann Page, Mr. Ford, Mr. Page, Mrs. Quickly, and a pack of other nonsense-mongers fresh from the farce mill of Will Shakespeare. The name of the farce was Merry Wives of Windsor, the play that Queen Bess ordered Shakespeare to write in order to depict Falstaff in love; and of course as Falstaff was already dead, Shakespeare had to dig him out of his grave and make the old corpse go through another spasm. And it was the liveliest resurrection of a corpse in the shape of a real George M. Cohan burlesque ever known in those days—or since? If our modern playwrights had a few queens to order them round we might have a few revivals with more punch in them than some of the new things they hatch up to please the box office.

But there was no box office in those days except the tavern Mermaid Inn and a few other choice tea rooms. And the utter prodigality of the time was all rolled up the size of a feather tick in the rolling, squinting, spluttering personage of Sir John Falstaff, stewing and sweating and guzzling in his wit and wisdom and his fine orange colored swatch of pleated clothes that came to one end at his shoepacks and to another at his carrot red face. He was a good old swine philosopher and not one who made a religion of having a good time and never failed to embrace the opportunity in the shape of another man's wife or a fresh flagon of ale.

As impersonated by Mr. Tom Wise he was a very obvious caricature, true to the original and disturbing nobody's preconceived notions of Falstaff. Wise



Madame Benita Le Mar, who for some years was a teacher of singing and recital artist in Toronto, now a Red Cross nurse at the front. Her English husband, Mr. Somers-Cocks, enlisted more than a year ago. The Madame herself is an American, but has spent much of her life in England.

had the role tumbled on him by chance when he was understudying for Hackett, and succeeded so well in it that he decided to form a Falstaff company of his own. He probably did not know that Prof. Malcolm Wallace, of Toronto University, used to tell his

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

Shakespeare classes that he considered Falstaff the most intellectual of all Shakespeare's men—not excepting Hamlet. But it probably did occur to him that The Merry Wives as a farce is as modern as anything George M. Cohan, George Ade or George B. Shaw ever turned out. And modern farce gives the mediaeval character of Falstaff a fine chance to work out. He rolls about the streets of Windsor, in and out of the Gaster ale house—a long time between drinks—sends his page boy with duplicate letters to Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, making identical love to each, arranges with Mrs. Quickly to see that the husbands are away from home when he calls; as un-moral as Caliban but as mirth-provoking as a circus clown and as wise as an owl. The way he plotted to make love to Mesdames Ford and Page is a masterpiece of blundering strategy. He is the natural ancestor of all the circus clowns and slapstick artists that ever lived. He could give a swift answer to any woman or man—especially woman. To Sir John there was as much voyage of discovery in the swindling skirts and fluffy-ruffles of a fair married lady as there was to Columbus in the New World. He was a fine, fat, old pirate, a sort of un-murderous Bluebeard who never hesitated to embrace an opportunity in the shape of a lady so long as she was another man's wife, had no visible means of support except the booty chucked to him by other people, and didn't seem to care a penny for the pomp of courts, or the perplexities of Parliament, or the whole circumstance of England, so long as he could keep Bardolph, Pistol and Kym scurrying around like knaves to carry him out of one trouble into another worse, his page boy to carry love letters to the ladies.

But, of course, it never would do to have Falstaff succeed without troubles. The glorious scope of this sixteenth century farce that might have given pointers to George M. Cohan or George B. Shaw, was at its height when the merry old rounder found himself about to be discovered by Mr. Ford in Mrs. Ford's house, when the two ladies bundled him into the clothes hamper and the two flunkies lugged him out, to dump him into the Thames. Then it was that Sir John delivered himself of the side-splitting lines:

"Have I lived to be carried in a basket, like a barrow of butcher's offal, and to be thrown in the Thames? Well, if I be served such another trick, I'll have my brains ta'en out, and buttered, and give them to a dog for a New Year's gift. The rogues slighted me into the river with as little remorse as they would have drowned a blind bitch's puppies, fifteen in the litter; and you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking; if the bottom were as deep as hell, I should drown. I had been drowned, but that the shore was shelvy and shallow—a death that I abhor; for the water swells a man; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swelled! I should have been a mountain of mummy."

Tom Wise delivered his lines with fine, rollicking distinction. There was a fine convivial ease about his work in sharp contrast to the stilted utterances of Mr. Ford and Mr. Page, both of whom were well represented by W. Lawson Burt (brother of Clara the giantess contralto), and Mr. Gordon Busley. Constance Collier as Mrs. Ford was enough of a lady of leisure and devilish enough to match the rather more unctuous and beautifully

amiable Mrs. Page so cleverly impersonated by Isabel Irving.

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A MUSICAL Canadian, now resident in New York, had arranged to come home for Christmas by middle of last week. He was sick of Broadway, gorged with opera, and wanted to come back to the simple



A NEW CURTAIN-RAISER.

Parrot and chatterbox in the hands of Miss Teddie O'Neill proves a very popular vaudevillesque. We are betting on—the chatterbox.

life for as long as possible. At the last moment he relented and wrote to a friend:

"I have decided to stay until the end of the week. I simply must hear that wonderful new opera of Riccardo Zandonai—Francesca da Rimini, on Friday evening at the Metropolitan."

Who is this Zandonai? He is a young Italian who has already had one work produced in New York; not much to look at in a photograph, an olive-eyed, spiky-haired youth with large ears set low down next to his collar. He is probably well known in Milan. In New York he is a novelty; and Gotham feeds on novelties. The performance last Friday at the Metropolitan was the first given in America; just as the performance of Strauss' Alpensinfonie by the old Philharmonic Orchestra noted on another page of this issue, was the premiere of that work this side of the Atlantic.


The story of the opera is as follows: The action of the tragedy takes place during the hostilities between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, and

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