

English Comedy in Canada

The First All-Canadian Tour of a First-Rate English Company from Coast to Coast

By JOHN MELVILLE

THE first high-class English comedy company that ever did an all-Canadian tour is now on its way through Canada. "A Marriage of Convenience," with Mr. Lewis Waller and Madge Titherage in the leading roles, has been seen already in several eastern cities, and is now



MR. LEWIS WALLER.
In "A Marriage of Convenience."

on its way westward. Mr. Lewis Waller is by many regarded as the leading English exponent of romantic roles. He is not essentially a comedian, though he is playing in a first-rate English adaptation of a really good French comedy by Alexander Dumas, done

into English by Sydney Grundy. He has played the leading role in Othello—well; Henry the Fifth many times; Monsieur Beaucaire a thousand times; and he shares with Tyrone Power distinction in the role of Brutus.

Like Sir Henry Irving, he has played in his own theatre in London for a number of years. He has more royal command appearances to his credit than any other living actor. His first production of "A Marriage of Convenience" was at Sandringham, by command of the late King Edward. Twelve years ago there was a bronze bust of him in the British Museum. By temperament and training he is a splendid interpreter of big romantic roles. At a small private gathering while in Toronto he stood before a huge fireplace and gave a remarkable rendering of "The Portrait," by Owen Meredith. The effect was almost marvelously realistic, without a vestige of make-up or stage setting, more than the big fireplace, a rug and a small group of men.

"I don't like this English weather in Canada," he said.

The day was wet. He had just driven his car down from the hill—he takes his car with him and always drives it himself. Though what he will do with it on the prairies at forty below he has not begun to imagine.

"But I am determined to enjoy it," he said. "I hope we shall get jolly well snowed in somewhere for ten hours."

Mr. Waller has not read the experiences of several concert companies wintering in the West; nor of many good theatrical organizations which of late years have been developing good circuits in the big towns of the prairie. In fact it is because western towns and cities have been getting on to the big circuits with good shows playing in well-appointed, modern theatres that Mr. Waller is able to take this first-rate comedy production beyond Winnipeg—to Regina, Medicine Hat, Moose Jaw, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon and on through the Rockies to Vancouver and Victoria. It is no longer a case of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room" playing in the town hall. The West has begun to become a good field for big circuit shows. The usual route is from Chicago via Minneapolis and St. Paul to Winnipeg and from there on to all the towns and cities included in the circuit for "A Marriage of Convenience." Of course theatres are mostly small and the distances are long-haul. In only a few towns is it possible to do more than one-night stands. But the price of tickets is much higher than in the East. There is little or no competition. A company as small as that in "A Marriage of Convenience," with but one stage-setting for the four acts, is highly economical to operate. There is no reason why the first all-Canadian tour of a leading romantic English actor should not be a commercially profitable venture.

English comedy in this country has had a rather chequered and uncertain career. With a clientele most admirably adapted to the appreciation of refined comedy produced in England, we have been compelled by the exigencies of our "magnificent distances" to take in the main only such productions as came to us on a circuit embracing United States cities, with now and again a company coming

direct from England. It is now nearly twenty years since that masterpiece of comedy, "A Pair of Spectacles," with John Hare in the leading role, came to us; and it is on record as perhaps the cleverest and most refined thing of its kind ever seen in this country. Though it played to good houses, the houses were so few and far between that it never came again. The company was too large and the accessories too numerous to permit of the play to go on at anything but a loss except on a circuit mainly operated in United States centres.

Of course we have never been quite divorced from good English comedy. We have had splendid productions at the hands of such masters as E. R. Willard, Charles Hawtrey, William Hawtrey—also in Canada lately—John Hare, Reeves Smith, Dallas Welford, Lawrence D'Orsay—in Canada again last week—and some others.

All these comedians have been well received in Canada; relatively more so than in the United States. There is a reason. It depends upon what may be considered humour, a subject upon which Englishmen and Americans do not agree. New York, for instance, considers *Punch* a dull whimsicality. London looks on *Life* as an example of smart cynicism that is not necessarily funny. Canadians read both *Punch* and *Life* and appreciate both.

So English comedy, which may be taken to represent English wit and humour, has a vogue in Canada. "A Marriage of Convenience," however, while played by English comedians, is French comedy in translation. The plot is rather psychological. There is little action. There are four acts in but one setting. Story, plot and action are all conditioned upon the lines. And the lines are peculiarly significant. Most French plays depend largely upon subtlety of lines. Most English translations of

French comedies miss that subtlety, or dull its edge by the English setting. "A Marriage of Convenience" was played in Montreal before it was seen in Toronto. It took just as well among the French-English audiences as it did to audiences purely English. For this the setting and the atmosphere and the character of the story are largely responsible. The manners of the piece are distinctly French—of necessity. It is conceivable that the play would have aroused even more enthusiasm in Montreal if done in French. I remember with what fine interest a largely French audience in Montreal heard that insuperably dull production, "Sire," which, to an English listener, was about as interesting as the Greek alphabet set to Hindu music. The comedy was in the lines and between the lines; in the unspeakable gestures and all the garniture of expression of which the French are the sublime masters. I remember, also, with what melancholy lassitude the empty benches in Toronto time after time heard Mdme. Rejane, a most accomplished actress, in a series of French plays done in French. It is quite possible the same plays done into English by such a master of translation as Sydney Grundy would have been highly popular; though it is almost certain that a French audience at a French comedy done in English is much more interested than an English audience at a similar comedy done in French.

To quote the analysis of the press agent regarding "A Marriage of Convenience":

"It is a digression of the old form of French marriage, which in some parts of France exists to-day. A young man and young woman, to the views of their parents, are quite intended for each other. Either side arranges a dowry and they are married forthwith, without any regard as to their own wishes. This is the theme of the play, and it is the falling in love of the apparently unhappily married couple that furnishes the charmingly amusing incidents of the piece."

Among the Music-Makers

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

THE finest string quartette in the world have once more been in Canada, where they have played during the past two years only less than half a dozen times. The Flonzaley Quartette are a remarkable corps of men. They have played together many years. Their names are—Adolf Betti, first violin; Alfred Pochon, second; Uga Ara, viola; Iwan D'Archambeau, 'cello. They seem to be a mixture of French, Italian and German by extraction. But for the most part they are Swiss-men. Years ago they were engaged by a musical citizen of some Swiss town to play together and stay together and go touring whenever he lets them. He pays whatever deficits there may be on long tours. They play the most nearly perfect programmes of chamber music ever heard in the world; as technically good as the Kneisels, and temperamentally much better.

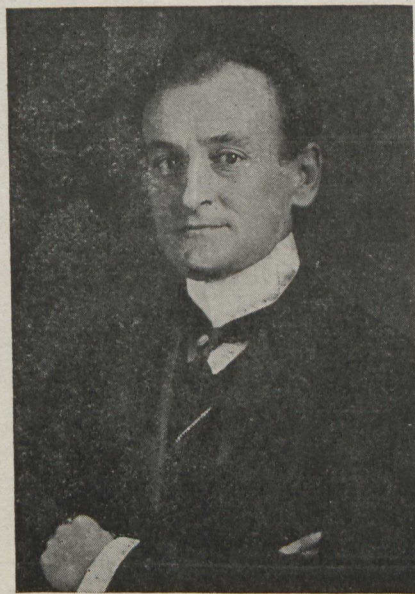
Their programme last week consisted of three pieces; a quartette of Tschaiakowsky, a trio of Sanmartini and a quartette of Haydn. The five hundred people who heard them in Columbus Hall, Toronto, probably agreed that never before had they heard anything quite so ravishingly fine in string music. Description of the playing is difficult. But there were times when the stage was a golden glow of soft music that seemed to come from nowhere in particular, universal in character, in colour and quality of tone unsurpassable. Again, they played *allegro* with such temperamental abandon; with such fire! Always each instrument seemed to be doing its best to be heard, yet not daring to go an atom beyond the due place allotted to it by the leader in interpretation. The Flonzaleys are not soloists playing in

concert. But they are four virtuosi that play together in perfect subordination as though they were parts of one glorious instrument. Such music belongs almost to the spheres. Yet it was not a whit too good for even a fashionable, partly musical and very lively audience, that insisted upon many recalls and were rewarded with one encore—a concession which the Flonzaleys seldom make to any audience.

GRAND orchestras are made, not born. In America, including Canada, the development of a few really big and two or three great orchestras has meant the expenditure of many millions. No symphony orchestra has ever been known to succeed without endowment by either one man or a band of guarantors or by civic or government aid.

The only orchestra in America supported outside of its regular revenues by the munificence of one man is the Boston Symphony, which will appear in Toronto one hundred strong, under the baton of Dr. Karl Muck, on the evening of January 29th. This is the largest number of players that ever went on tour in America. It is the second time the Boston Symphony has appeared in Canada; the last time being in October, 1905, when Wilhelm Gericke was conductor. As the Boston Symphony is by many competent critics regarded as the best orchestra in the world, this visit will be quite as sensational as the appearance last spring of the London Symphony under Nikisch.

The story of this orchestra is remarkably interesting, for it is the one standard by which all big orchestras in America are (Concluded on page 30.)



DR. KARL MUCK,
Conductor, Boston Symphony Orchestra.
First Time in Canada.