

"Damaged Goods"

And Other Recent Play Ventures

By JOHN E. WEBBER

BRIEUX is not altogether a stranger to us. Not many seasons ago Mr. Laurence Irving made a pilgrimage from London on the French playwright's behalf and pleaded his claim to public attention in eloquent terms. In proof he submitted admirable presentations in his own translations of "The Incubus" (*Les Hanneçons*) and "The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont." But the actor's mission was not a success. He was unable to communicate his enthusiasms beyond a little coterie of predisposed admirers, and to the public generally, Brieux would have become little more than a name but for "Damaged Goods" and the *Medical Review of Reviews*.

Les Avaries, or "Damaged Goods," as it is in-

further spread practically unlimited. This harvest is a direct consequence of the man's wilful marriage against his physician's entreaties. Professional ethics seal the doctor's lips and the wife, kept in ignorance, is unable to protect herself or others from the ravages of a malady more deadly than tuberculosis. Such an outspoken presentation of undeniable facts cannot fail to have a salutary effect on the public conscience. The dangers it exposes also disarm any possible objection on the score of delicacy. Society and the health of future generations are of infinitely more consequence than private sensibilities. The only pity is that there is not some other medium than the drama, which, as an art, has duties and obligations of a positive character to perform. But the fact remains that there is not. The press is otherwise engaged—chiefly in political triflings; and the pulpit has not contributed much to the discussion or propagation of social truth. The theatre, on the other hand, is in intimate touch with the emotions of the public and better positioned to reach its heart and conscience than either.

"Damaged Goods" is a medical treatise in play form. Brieux in this has subordinated his art to wing his message direct into men's souls.

"The Necessary Evil," a recently published one-act play by Charles Rann Kennedy, author of "The Servant in the House," contains quite as obvious a preachment on the subject of moral cleanness, with a hint also of the theme of "The Blindness of Virtue." Mr. Kennedy's play has not yet been produced, so that it is impossible to speak of its acting qualities.

REVIVAL, as well as "reform" has been prominent in the spring activities. To "The Beggar Student" and "The Geisha" included in a former account, have now been added the ever-popular "Mikado" and "Iolanthe." In dramatic revivals we have had Lester Wallack's "Rosedale"; Pinero's "The Amazons," and Augustus Thomas' old time favourite, "Arizona." "Rosedale" was first produced fifty years ago and has been revived a number of times since. For the benefit of this generation an outline of the play may be in order at this time. Lady May has been left a widow and the terms of the will forbid her remarrying without the consent and approval of Col. Cavendish May. If he refuses to agree and the Lady May persists, her rights to the property pass with her remarriage to the Colonel and her young son. The Colonel, of course, proves to be a designing villain. With the assistance of a Gypsy and ex-convict, he determines to get possession of the entire fortune by refusing his consent to a marriage and making away with the boy at the same time. The villainy is exposed through the lover of Rosa Leigh, sister of the man Lady May wants to marry. He invades the Gypsy camp where the young Sir Arthur has been kept prisoner a year, captures and returns him to his mother and at the same time fastens the crime firmly on the Colonel's shoulders.

"The Amazons" had its first New York presen-



Miss Chrystal Herne, in "Arizona."

tation in 1894. The story tells how Lady Castlejordan, out of respect to her late husband and disappointed that her only three children are girls instead of boys, brings them up in male attire and familiarizes them with all the sports and pastimes peculiar to men. Interest in the present revival, at any rate a large share of it, is undoubtedly due to the presence of Miss Billie Burke, in the part of "Tommy" the girl who grew up a boy. The management, properly appreciative of this fact, took pains to announce this as the charming actress's first appearance on the stage in boy's clothes. Not to underestimate the privilege of this introduction to hitherto unrevealed charms, we would like to plead the abundant acting charms of the young lady as sufficient reason for attendance.

IN New York, lighter offerings have the call. "Are You a Crook?" by William J. Hurlburt, lightly satirizes the prevailing demand for crook plays, through the experiences of a young girl predisposed to crook play matinees. The manner in which plays of this class develop heroics leads her to idealize the gentleman burglar in quest of whom she complicates the domestic relations of her own and kindred families in three acts of satirical farce. The locale includes a fashionable Long Island estate and the rooms of a young bachelor in Washington Square. "Are You a Crook?" opens the new Longacre Theatre, the most recent addition to the already appalling list of Broadway playhouses.

Madame Bernhardt is also with us for a two weeks' engagement prior to her departure for Europe. This also completes a tour of the vaudeville stage of America. Scenes from her famous plays make up her programme each afternoon and evening.



Miss Billie Burke, in "The Amazons."

adequately translated, is a powerful indictment of a social condition that permits a diseased person to marry. The play is absolutely frank in statement and relentless in the pursuit of consequences. It was produced under medical patronage, and curiosity has been stimulated just as it was in the beginning of the career of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," with the same result—boredom for the multitude, shekels for the box office and unpleasant notoriety for the playwright. "Damaged Goods" is a popular success, while "The Incubus" and "The Three Daughters of M. Dupont," comedies of brilliant, mordant wit and tremendous social import both, went begging for audiences. Like his brilliant English contemporary and admirer, Bernard Shaw, Brieux is a frank advocate of the stage as a public educator. All his plays are a medium for social exposition and the criticism of contemporary morality. "The Incubus" is a study in the delusiveness of that sort of freedom which the relation of mistress is supposed to give; Monsieur Dupont of familiar forms of social hypocrisy.

IN "Damaged Goods" we have the story of a father's uncleanness visited on the wife, the child and the child's nurse, with possibilities for



Scene from Act 3, in "Are You a Crook?" in Which Marguerite Clark and George Fawcett are the Stars.