

New Plays of the Week

"Hindle Wakes," "The High Road," "Peg o' My Heart," and Others

By JOHN E. WEBBER

THE traditional lull in theatrical activity, which invariably precedes the Christmas week, has been broken by the arrival of several new plays, among them, one, at least, proving a genuine dramatic event. Like so many of the current successes of the season, the piece in question comes by way of London, where it is said to have created very much of a sensation. "Hindle Wakes" is the title, and Mr. Stanley Houghton, heretofore unknown outside the cotton districts of Lancashire, where its scenes are laid, is the author. "Hindle" is any one of the centres of the textile industry, and "Wake" the local name for the annual week of holiday, which in the play as in the continental St. John's Eve, symbolizes an interruption in the ordinary routine of conventional life—an interval when primitive instincts come to the surface. This is what happens to Fanny Hawthorne, one of the mill hands, who goes with the mill owner's son to spend a week end at the sea shore. The affair is found out by the parents of both and naturally assumes a more serious aspect than the merely "good time" they intended. The young man is quite willing to marry the girl, but she refuses this conventional expedient for her moral regeneration, insists on her equal responsibility, and decides to work out her own salvation. To disclose the interesting denouement would be to rob intending spectators of a genuine surprise.

THE appearance of Mrs. Fiske in a new play is always an occasion of more than ordinary interest. She has chosen for her vehicle this year "The High Road," written by Edward Sheldon, author of "Salvation Nell," "The Nigger," and "The Boss." The heroine of the new play is a woman who rises to a high place in the world of humanity by sheer qualities of heart and mind. We see her first as a girl in the narrow environments of an up-state farm, obeying the whims of a miserly father as if she were fulfilling a law of nature. An artist who comes to the farm finally succeeds in arousing her to a need of beauty and a freer life, and, quitting the farm she comes to New York with him in search of both. Three years pass in the midst of beauty, but, finding her nature still unsatisfied she leaves her lover to take up the work of a factory girl with a view to improving labour conditions. Years later she engineers a bill through the Legislature thereby winning the admiration of the governor, who makes her his wife. The skeleton of the past, of course, has to arise, and the time chosen is the governor's candidacy for the Presidential nomination. All in all, "The High Road" is the most representative American play of the season.

"THE CONSPIRACY," by John Roberts, a newspaper and magazine writer, is a play of New York Tenderloin life. Margaret Holt, who

has been a white slave victim until her escape, is devoting her life to wiping out the Scarlet Band, as the white slave gang is called. In this purpose she is assisted by her brother, an Assistant District Attorney. To get information she works as a stenographer for Pedro Alvarez, leader of the gang, who poses as a cutlery merchant. To prevent the band from killing her brother and to save her own life, she has to kill Alvarez. Through the intervention of a newspaper reporter Margaret gets into the service of Winthrop Clavering, author and amateur detective, who writes stories based on crime. He writes about the Alvarez murder and Margaret is compelled to take it down under his dictation. Her guilt is discovered and Clavering is about to surrender her to the police, thereby endangering her brother's life, whom the gang is holding as a hostage. However, he is finally persuaded to help her and save her brother's life.

"THE INDISCRETION OF TRUTH"

is a comedy adapted by J. Hartley Manners from the Wilkie Collins novel, "Man and Wife." Truth Coleridge indiscreetly consents to elope with one Bruce Darrell, a gentleman athlete, who suffers a physical breakdown. Darrell takes her to a Scotch inn, where she is obliged to represent herself as a married woman in order to gain admittance. This, according to an old Scottish law, constitutes a marriage. Darrell is summoned away almost immediately and sends a Capt. Greville to look after Truth. The Captain, to protect the girl, asks for her as his wife, which also constitutes a presumptive form of marriage. Further complications follow, but finally Truth's guardian is able to extricate her from her entanglements and marry her himself. An excellent cast with Walter Hampden, Frank Kemble Cooper and Ann Murdock at the head, are presenting the piece.

"PEG O' MY HEART,"

a new comedy in which Laurette Taylor is starring, is also from the pen of Mr. Manners. Peg, the daughter of a lovable, but improvident, Irishman, and an aristocratic English mother, now dead, is brought to England to be educated and reared in the ways of polite English society, at the expense of her mother's brother, for which provision had been made in his will. An impoverished aunt is persuaded to undertake the girl's instruction for a handsome fee, and Peg's experiences with the punctilious, snobbish family provides a vein of rich comedy. Peg is a refreshing character study admirably suited to Miss Taylor's own particular comedy methods, and the story is sufficiently entertaining to carry the interest. H. Reeves-Smith plays a sympathetic and understanding friend admirably.

IN these days of feminist agitation Mere Man is surely getting "his." If any one doubts it let him consult the experience of Mr. Augustus Thomas, once dean of American playwrights, but lately author of a comedy which, under the title, "Mere Man," set out to deal in semi-humorous fashion with certain phases of the movement. There was much truth in some of the playwright's utterances, but, alas, much confusion likewise in their setting forth.



Mrs. Fiske in "The High Road."

The two imposed a burden beyond the play's strength.

"THE WHIP," the great Drury Lane spectacular melodrama just presented on the stage of the Manhattan Opera House, is a smashing success from start to finish. The delighted audiences also prove that the days of good old melodrama are not dead by any means, provided only that the melodrama be good, red stuff, with plenty of thrills, plenty of suspense, plenty of laughter, and that sufficient mechanical ingenuity be expended on its presentation. All these "The Whip" provides on a scale in keeping with the best traditions of Drury Lane.

A new comic opera, "The Firefly," with the dainty Trentini singing the leading role, has also been added to the attractions.

General News.

MR. HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS, the well-known Canadian short story writer, now living in New York, has scored a success with his play entitled "The Argyle Case." This was produced in Atlantic City for the first time early in the season and has since been on the road. It opened in New York at the Criterion Theatre, on December 24th, and repeated its outside success. The experts believe that it is good for a five-months run in that city. Mr. Robert Hilliard takes the leading part. The story is based on some detective experiences of Mr. Burns, the head of the detective agency which bears his name. On the opening night Mr. Burns was present and was called before the curtain. He made a neat speech, giving credit to Mr. O'Higgins for the good points in the play. Mr. O'Higgins has associated with him as author Miss Harriet Ford, who is also the author of "The Fourth Estate" and other plays.

"The Child," a melodrama in three acts, was recently produced for the first time in Fort Worth, Texas, with Margaret Anglin in the leading role. The story deals with the efforts of a young couple to defeat a will, by which a large fortune is bequeathed to the eldest child of the couple, provided it is born within ten months of the date on the will. The young husband is sentenced to prison shortly before the writing of the will. The baby is not born to the couple. They accordingly kidnap another woman's child and claiming it as their own return to their home town to receive their fortune. The baby's foster mother becomes attached to the child and it is with great difficulty that she can be compelled to acknowledge that the baby is not her own and to give it up. Miss Anglin is the wife in the story and William Howard is the young husband and convict. The play went fairly well considering that this was its first presentation.



James C. Taylor, Alice O'Dea, and Emelie Polini, in a scene from "Hindle Wakes."