

# THE PLAY'S THE THING

**P**LAYS are in a condition of unusual disturbance. This is true almost the world over, especially in those countries whose production of plays affects the kind of stage menu Canadians have to expect on our theatre boards, as well as those that seem to be out on the skyline. But the theatre is still as good an index to the popular mind as war criticism or stock exchange news or sporting gossip, and it is the intention of this article to give a sort of Filmagraph picture of what is going forward in the world of plays and players as represented by the plays now going the rounds in various countries.

When Sir Herbert Tree, for instance, brought his company to America, he realized that England, or rather London, her heart and brain, ordinarily appreciative of serious art, is not in the mood for entertainment except of the lightest sort. The British, more or less sober thinkers, on the whole, cannot bear to think in such a crisis as now prevails, when it would mean an emotional breakdown. Distractions must be had. There were, this Christmas, no less than thirty-seven productions in London, four of them pantomimes of the genuine old character, notably "Puss in New Boots," and five others, "children's plays"; among these, "The Happy Family," written in part by Cecil Aldin, with scenery and costumes designed by him, a barnyard phantasy done, of course artistically, but far from the delightful atmosphere of hunts and huntsmen associated with the artist's very name.

Then there are, or are to be, a number of American productions in London: "Potash and Perlmutter," "Potash and Perlmutter in Society," "Within the Law," "Kick In," etc., all, you see, requiring but little mental exertion to appreciate.

So different is this attitude from the French. The Gallic mind, effervescent—superficially—under normal circumstances becomes tense, grammatic, exalted under stress. When the divine Sarah played to the soldiers, before her advent to these shores, she gave them the most serious aspect of her art, not from premeditation, not because she knew it would suit them best, but because that was the way she felt, which, of course, suited them all the better. And though no longer in France, she is still under the spell of conditions abroad just as is France, which she typifies with utter fidelity. "Du Theatre au Champ d'Honneur" ("From the stage to the field of honour"), one of the plays on her New York programme, is patriotic to the highest degree; "Les Cathedrales," a symbolic play in which she impersonates the spirit of one of France's oldest, most venerable churches and all that such an edifice stands for, breathes the soul of old France, with all its dignity, courage and heroism.

**YVETTE GUILBERT**, another faithful exponent of her country's psychology, shows the same fearlessness of emotion, "letting herself go" with a vengeance, in her mirth, her sadness or her fervour in the series she is giving of recitals of songs illustrating the history of song in France, and incidentally the evolution of French history itself.

Isadora Duncan, though not French, has caught the same fire, and now interprets in her symbolic dancing, with other martial effects, the significance of the Marseillaise.

The war certainly makes itself felt in these ways. In Paderewski's joint recital and address on behalf of his countrymen, this burning patriot, generally so self-contained, cannot and will not refrain from venting his pent-up feelings and emotions. The speech is white-heat.

In America we find a still different point of view. Americans are intensely interested, but only in an intellectual or theoretical way, in the European situation. Not being so directly concerned, they can bear to listen to discussions of the subject with equanimity, as they did to Nazimova in "War Brides," and to Barrie's sparkling satire, "Der Tag"; they can also bear to forget discussions of the subject

## A Quick Run Over Theatre Offerings in the Big Play-Production Centres

By T. BERNARD PRESTON



These Metropolitan Opera Stars photographed the other day in New York, are supposed to be in a very blessed frame of mind. They have all just taken inhalations of vapor from a certain water shipped from a little village of Italy. Caruso—smiling as usual—in the back row, is president of the company, Daniel Frohman stands on the left.

and enjoy with the same equanimity spectacles entirely irrelevant. They never go to the play to learn a lesson or have a moral pointed—at them; the only way to make them assimilate such a dose is so to sugar it that they do not recognize its medicinal properties. And the pageant of shows in the States is opulent in its variety.

One of the most important productions is Sir Herbert Tree's "Henry VIII," lavishly staged and costumed, with its long and excellent cast headed by

very lively, agitated comedy, based on the great Russian empress, and the third, mostly dialogue without any action, but bristling with shafts against the Kaiser, nobility, democracy, the United States, war, nationalism, humanity, in short, any and everything.

Cyril Maude has had bad luck; starting his season with "Jeff," an amiable but ineffective play adapted from Stephen Leacock's delightful Sunshine Sketches, he switched to "The Baskers," which was still less impressive, and finally had to revert to his previous vehicle, "Grumpy," pretty well known by this time.

There are two other revivals to be mentioned: David Warfield, in the cleverly sentimental "Music Master," after several years of less successful playing is again drawing tears and laughter; and Marie Tempest acts cleverly in the very light "Her Husband's Wife."

A much better comedy is Baine's "A Kiss for Cinderella" (with Maude Adams), a dream, play, fantastic, pretty, not without keen satire.

**NAZIMOVA** is starring in "Ception Shoals"—the title is no more curious than the play—in which, as is so often the case with her, morbid problems are aired. It is far from the comparatively high note struck in "War Brides."

Rather successful dramatization from a novel has been done by Langdon Mitchell for John Drew, from Thackeray's "Pendennis"; the prologue is particularly good through skilful condensation of the plot of the book, though the atmosphere of the whole is not nearly as successfully re-created as was once done in "Vanity Fair," for Mrs. Fiske.

Apropos of this lady's recent invectives against repertory which she claims is harmful to a player—since it dissipates his concentration—one wonders what must think Guy Bates Post, at present touring in "The Masquerader," a somewhat melodramatic play built from Mr. Thurston's much worse novel, "John Chilcote, M.P.," with its plot depending on the fortuitous meeting of a man and his double



Gath-Casezza, managing director of The People in the above photograph has a problem on his hands. Gotham does not like modern French operas—at present. But, of course, you never can tell when it will.