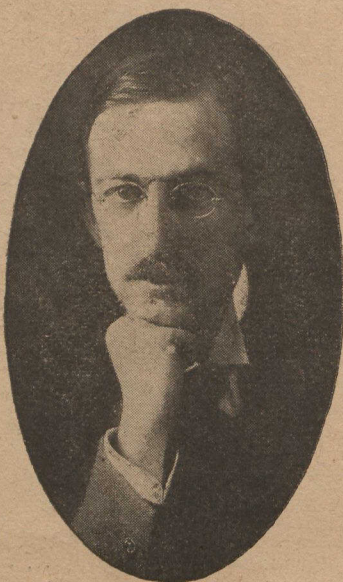


LITTLE PLAYS AND OTHER SHOWS



The Authors of the "Lost Silk Hat" and "The Post Office" and all those little semi-domestic plays, see in this picture of Richard Walton Tully's "Flame Girls," just the kind of thing they abominate.

A curious complication of stageries seen in the hub of New World Theatricals



And Tully Knows it

By

T. BERNARD PRESTON

DOWN in New York as the season draws to a close we are reminded of colossal contrasts on stage. Leaving out grand opera, you might make an Ibsen triangle of plain shows, Little Theatres—and G. B. S. Take your choice what shaped triangle it is and which side you prefer to be the longest. The Little Theatre in various styles and names is the newest note, though it attracts the least number of people.

Since the earliest days of the drama, as in Greece, when a production was a solemn and awe-inspiring spectacle, there has been a tendency to regard it with less and less of the "reverence that finally kills" (as Miss Constance Collier put it to us, one day), and to take it more easily, more intimately, in other words to relate it more closely to actual life. This idea of familiarity is doubtless what made for the simplicity of setting of the Elizabethan days (when some of the audience actually sat on the stage), and surely that was the golden age of English drama, if, indeed, Shakespeare may not justify its claim to the greatest of all theatrical eras. Since then a false sophistication has removed the stage, for a while, beyond such personal touch; but the evolution of experience always sifts out artificialities, and progressive cities, we have in mind New York, particularly—are at last taking the drama again in earnest, simple, heart-to-heart fashion. This manifests itself just now in the plentiful crop of successful productions on a little scale, of little plays, mostly one-act plays, which are engrossing the attention of the public and stimulating the art both of playwrights and of actors. There was a saying: "Good goods come in small packages," which might be paraphrased: "Good plays come in small packed houses."

In this group of pioneers, the Washington Square Players are easily the leading lights. Beginning but a little over a year ago with modest ambitions, such as attempting to play but twice a week, painting their own scenes, making their own costumes, to say nothing of their plays, they have come to having a studio where they do such things for other producers, as well as inaugurating a school for players, while they have not lowered the excellence of their work on the boards, but have gone on raising it ever higher. Their plays range from works by Maeterlinck

and Chesterton, to indigenous products, such as "the Clod."

And there are others: the Bramhall, the Bandbox, the Provincetown Players, the Neighbourhood, the Portmanteau, etc.; there has even been a series of one-act plays for children; and an attempted series, under the name of "The Nine O'Clock Theatre" in a private house! Then there is the Little Silver Theatre Club, which plays to audiences of no more than two hundred private members plays written especially for it; we rather wonder if in this case the exclusiveness of the scheme will not prove its undoing.

But of all these workers in the field, after the Washington Square Players, of course, the Neighbourhood and Portmanteau Players are the most conspicuous; the Neighbourhood has rather specialized in Shaw's plays, with Lord Dunsany on the side; the Portmanteau has reversed the menu.

THERE has seldom been such a meteoric rise in the favour of those who go to the play as that of this extremely—and deservedly—popular Irish peer, who at present, after being wounded in the war, is again somewhere in the trenches, quite unaffected by the attention his works are attracting. Modest to a fault, unconscious prose-poet and symbolist—for he disclaims the idea of writing allegories—he is at once simply sincere and elaborately versatile. True, he seldom, if ever, deals with romance; he is too cosmic for that (though he has written a delightful bit of playfulness about "A Silk Hat"), but his "Night at an Inn," dealing with the consequences of theft and murder overtaking, through supernatural means, a party of sailors, and "The Gods of the Mountains," in which seven beggars are turned to stone by seven jealous stone gods they had impersonated, are a far cry from "The Glittering Gate," which presents decidedly modern ideas of the future life, and "The Queen's Enemies," which unfolds no moral but depicts the awful and consummate revenge of a woman at bay. Again, "Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" strikes the pathetic note, in its conception of a king reduced to slavery and hunger. His plays are small as to length and detail, but they loom large in subject-matter and impressiveness.

Shaw is going strong in no less than four plays, in New York: "Getting Married," with William Faversham and Henrietta Crosman, a comedienne of rare refinement and insight; "Great Catherine," in which Gertrude Kingston plays the Russian empress with most convincing naturalness; "The Inca of Perusalem," a piquant satire on the Kaiser and British royalty (were Mr. Shaw an American, and did he treat his country as he is doing the land to which he actually owes allegiance, it is doubtful if he would be so well applauded in New York); and "Over-ruled," a story of two married couples tangled and extricated—the usual conventional immorality for the author to jibe at.

HERE are the names of some of the "shows" that make any theatre page of a New York Sunday look like a Persian rug in design:

Nazimova, in "Ception Shoals," a play about an impossibly ingenuous young woman, who incidentally displays her physique in a manner not as attractive as is intended.

"Le Rubicon," by the French Players, a play true to the so-styled "French" type, by a Frenchman strangely enough; very well done, though it might seem "raw" in English.

"Lilac Time," in part by Jane Cowl, in which she takes the heroine's part; a war-play and a bore-play: pretty soldiers, martial girl.

"A Successful Calamity," with William Gillette, by his cousin, Clare Kummer, a well-acted modern comedy, not very unlike Willie Collier's "Nothing but the Truth"; may it justify its name!

"The Great Divide," by William Vaughan Moody, revived by Henry Miller; when first produced, this was pronounced the greatest American play ever written; if such really be the case—we would hesitate to affirm it—the American does not seem appreciative of its benefit.

"Johnny, Get Your Gun!" a farce that is but tolerably farcical, and a sorry one.

"The Life of Man," by Andreyeff (the Washington Square Players, for once, give a five-act play), produced with striking new effects in stage lighting, but so doleful in tone that it seems to leave no light in the rest of life.

"Love o' Mike," a "comedy with music"—on the part of the orchestra, at any rate; the vocalists are inaudible and merely look as if they were singing.

And "It," an absurd melodrama, based on the absurd presumption of Japan's enmity to the United States; though the author seeks to exculpate himself for his distrust of the Orientals by making it a "dream-play," and not presenting it as actual; it

(Concluded on page 27.)



His revival of The Great Divide is one of the rejuvenated chestnuts of New York.