



AFTER the crowded houses, the extended run and monetary profit which greeted the "Brownies" first appearance on the Toronto stage, it is venturesome to assert that the play—or rather spectacle—was a disappointment. Yet, there is no doubt many people considered it so.

Because it *was* a spectacle and not a play; and because the spectacle, while of merit in its kind, was yet not the kind anticipated, lovers of the Brownies experienced a disillusioning when the curtain fell upon the "flying ballet," the last feature of the so-called Brownie production.

The Brownies are so closely associated with child life that naturally their appearance upon the stage was looked forward to by the children; while adults expected to see something pretty, fun-full, whimsical, yet wholesome—a unique fairy pantomime—which they could enjoy with the children, and from which they could come away with the merry, kindly laugh upon their lips.

It may have been an unreasonable expectation, since elves and their gambols are difficult to reproduce with any degree of realism; nevertheless, it existed, hence the disappointment.

"Brownie-land" is in no especial sense a play for children. There are many other plays upon the stage to-day more suitable for child enjoyment. It is a Brownie play in name only. The men and women selected for the Brownie rôles are with few exceptions of average adult height; there are no children in the caste; while the dialogue is quite beyond childish comprehension and of the kind found in the average comic opera.

As a vaudeville entertainment, or one simply spectacular, the production was good, although not much above the average. As a comic opera—and it partook somewhat of this nature—it was decidedly below the average, in music, dialogue and movement.

As a portraiture of the Brownies and their deeds, as Mr. Cox has pictured them, it was not a success. Without being hypercritical, the fall of the curtain leaves us believing that a much prettier and more whimsical production might have been devised.

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"The Magic Kiss," as produced at the Grand for three brief evenings in March, is one of the best comic operas that has visited Toronto this season. It takes rank with "Erminie," "Poor Jonathan" and "Dorothy." In merit of music it is a distinct advance upon either of the latter.

The plot is much above that of the average comic opera in its suggestion of philosophic truth. Instead of the blurred impossible pretense which usually constitutes the plot of a light opera, we are given a conception containing material for an effective drama.

The shaking centenarian, quavering of his

strength and the years which he counts still before him, yet longing for the love kiss which shall restore him a quarter century; the stately, snuff-taking, uxorious, old husband of seventy-five; the roystering, full-blooded squire of fifty; and last, the gallant youth of twenty-five; these appear

each in his turn, the successive results of the "Magic Kiss."

The fun turns, of course, upon the fancy that the fourth kiss is asserted to bring the handsome young husband of twenty-five back to before birth; and between the mutual love of the young husband and wife, and their desire that the former shall continue to exist, a very laughable situation is evolved.

The music of the "Magic Kiss" is very bright, full of melodious morceaux and tuneful choruses. The dialogue is crisp, the movement good throughout.

The opera was finely presented by Camille D'Arville and her company. The voices were unusually good, the acting restrained yet full of verve, the costumes becoming yet modest.

The presentation suggested a fine taste and discriminating judgment extending to every detail, from the strong spirited rendition of the orchestra to the rolic of the comedian.

The tendency to buffoonery, which is one of the temptations to be guarded against in comic opera, was, in this instance, carefully avoided.

Camille D'Arville, who takes the leading rôle, is a refined actress, with a voice of unusual power. In her dressing-room one discovers that she is personally both attractive and cultured. The foreign touch in her speech serves to give piquancy both on and off the stage, which cannot be said of Rhéa, whose force is rather diminished thereby.

"I have been delighted with the success of 'The Magic Kiss' this season," said Miss D'Arville, as she toyed with a cluster of Marshal Neils; "we ran twelve weeks in New York, where we only expected to run two or three. And in other places it has been the same, except Toronto; but I suppose the Brownies carried away all your spare money?"

"I should like to stay in Toronto to hear that 'Messiah' with Albani in it and Norman Salmond. I know Mr. Salmond well; he is my friend; he is nice."

"Yes; I am glad you do admire the restraint in our opera. We try to keep it very bright. It is refined, too, is it not? I do not like anything that is vulgar, and there is no need of it, I think. And the music is good; we have some fine voices."

"No, I have only been in Toronto once before, when I came with the 'Poor Jonathan' company."

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Miss D'Arville wears some fine diamonds. Her voice in speaking is rather soft and low, giving no hint of its power and range upon the stage.

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Melodrama has, or should have, an attraction for really first-rank actors, since it lays strong hold upon the masses of our people. Music halls of the noted London type have

not begun in Toronto. There is no demand for them; let us hope there never will be. There is excellent catering for the emotional public in the wholesome melodrama provided at the Toronto Opera House. I have looked in many times during the present season and have never found an objectionable play upon the boards.

Such plays as "Jack Harkaway" and "Hands Across the Sea" have much real merit, since they stimulate the moralities, stir patriotic sentiment and give a "vent" for the natural emotions of a healthy people, who like their villain to be villainous in a frankly, open way, their hero to be just as laudably heroic, their forsaken wife—there usually is one—appealingly wifely, and their pretty soubrette captivatingly saucy.

And why not? Such plays are more attractive to all sane people than the morbid if mor artistic attractions for which we pay three times the price and receive six times the moral injury.

It is worth while to witness the hearty expressions of approval or disappointment in which lovers of the melodrama indulge. They hiss the villain and cheer the hero; they groan at the former's plottings and enthusiastically applaud the high moralities of the latter; while every patriotic utterance—and no melodrama is complete without one or more—is greeted with a storm of cheers and clappings.

It is all very well to indulge in critical shrugs, to talk about "rant" and "cheap sentiment." It is a good thing that sentiment is cheap, else many of us would have to go without the strongest staying force in our lives. It is easy enough to smile the tolerant smile of superiority, but the men and women who make the nations—"the masses," if you will—are healthy in their instincts when they turn from morbid analysis and demand melodrama.

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Montreal is not looked upon as a mascot in the theatrical world. There are more companies financially wrecked there than in any other city of its size.

The large French element in population probably accounts for this. Certainly it is not an encouraging city, viewed dramatically. Operas are preferred to dramas, since the French love music. But a first-class musical organization meets with greater success than any other form of entertainment in the old city under the mountain.

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The throng of men and women that awaited the first appearance of the three-headed woman upon the stage of the Crystal Theater showed the interest of the masses in the abnormal.

When the curtains were parted, revealing an apparent optical delusion, and a very simple one at that, the hisses and hootings of the throng betrayed their appreciation of the situation.

The crowd extended its scepticism to the large python, which lay with war-like stillness in its cage.

A very real freak was the man with the abnormal forehead development, who is well worth a scientific study.

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