

ENGLISH COMEDY IN CANADA

"Merry Wives of Windsor" and "The Thunderbolt" in our first two cities.

THE New Theatre Company of New York wound up its first visit to Canada—Montreal and Toronto—by a week ending last Saturday at the Royal Alexandra Theatre. They produced two things in Canada: one by Arthur Pinero called "The Thunderbolt"; one by William Shakespeare known as "The Merry Wives of Windsor." The latter was sub-titled on the programme, "A Farce in Five Acts." Montreal had the honour of being the birthplace of "The Thunderbolt" so far as the New Theatre Company and America are concerned. For once in the history of theatricals on this continent both Montreal and Toronto got ahead of New York in production. "The Thunderbolt" was rehearsed in both cities to get the kinks out of the machinery and to make smooth running for the New Theatre, which is the cathedral of dramatic art on this continent.

Eighty per cent. of the things we get in Canada are tried out in New York and get to us seasoned and mellow, even if a bit rickety in spots. The New Theatre people had faith enough in Canadian appreciation to try out "The Thunderbolt" here.

It must be said that of the two, Mr. Shakespeare's "farce" was the more popular. "The Thunderbolt" is quite as English; but relates to provincial England; a satire on sordid people, brothers and sisters of whom, one a wealthy bachelor brother has died apparently intestate. The play opens with a house of mourning; next of kin sorrowful, but needing the money. One relative is missing; an "illegitimate" daughter of the deceased in Paris unknown to the "next of kin." the revelation of the mystery over the will constitutes "The Thunderbolt"—which is a rather misleading title. The fact of the matter is that the wife of the youngest brother has destroyed the will. Being with the dying man in his last moments, she got access to the document which she found was drawn up in favour of the mysterious daughter in Paris who in due time arrives on the scene.

Pinero's art motive in writing the play seems to have been to satirise caste-ridden, shopkeeping provincial England. It was noticeable that the Canadian audience seemed to grip the situations very easily; which quite surprised a rather *blase* Londoner next to the writer.

"However can that sort of thing be expected to go here?" he said. "Do you mean to say that a democratic audience where grocers' daughters sit with the sons of financiers—"

"Provided the grocer is wholesale of course?"

"Ah! Exactly. And he may even sell meat. But how do these people who make no such sharp distinctions in society detect the subtleties of a play like that?"

"Well, evidently—we do. You see, we like to see England satirised quite as well as England herself does."

"Hm'm! I wonder how Canadians would enjoy seeing satires on Canada?"

"Oh, we get them—from English writers—occasionally; the chap, for instance, who comes out for a week's run across the continent and goes home to write a book about Canada."

"Ah!" he broke in. "I wonder—if that grocer's daughter hasn't destroyed the will?"

In truth, he had spotted the coming of the thunderbolt before the end of the first act; which is another tribute to Pinero's splendid technic.

The play was exceedingly well done. Perhaps it was done rather too well. It bore the marks of great study.

There was a good deal of the statue and the tableau. Those who have seen such delicious comedies as "The Tyranny of Tears" and "A Pair of Spectacles" sacred to the inimitable John Hare; not to mention the comedy satires of "G. B. S." may have wished for a greater degree of freedom in expression and less regard for mere stage technic.

There was no lack of interest however. The climax was convincing without being especially powerful. At the same time it gave evidence of great restraint and superb attention to stage business. Merely as the art of acting it left little to be desired. What it lacked was due in part to the genius of Pinero who seems to have copied the technical methods of Sardou. The "intellectual" element was never wanting.

"The characterisation seems to be good," I observed to the Londoner.

"But how do you know that?" he insisted. "You can't be familiar with provincial England here."

"Fudge! We're provincial ourselves."

"Well the characters surely are good."

"But you don't seem very exuberant."

"Well—there is a time for exuberance over a play. That is youth. You have plenty of youth in Canada."

"A bit green you mean."

"By no means. Merely you are not—*blase*. I am delighted that so excellently constructed and well acted a play goes here so well as it does."

But a Londoner of course knows his Pinero as well as he does his Shakespeare and his "G. B. S." and his Gilbert and Sullivan. The New Theatre Company succeeded in drawing big appreciative houses in Canada, without being less artistic or more emotional than they are in the New Theatre in New York.

Which is something.

Public Ownership

EDITORIALLY the Kingston *Standard* favours municipal ownership, but is opposed to government ownership. Commenting on a recent article in THE CANADIAN COURIER, the Kingston editor bases his arguments on men rather than theories. Inefficient management is the great fault of large municipal or government undertakings. He concludes:

"After all it seems to be a question of employing the right men to manage the business. Our own waterworks plant is a striking argument in favour of municipal ownership. Under private ownership very high rates were charged for water and not more than one-fifth of the people were using it. Now, the rates are one-third of what they formerly were and only a very small percentage of the population are non-users of water, and it is hoped that very soon every citizen in Kingston will have the city water piped into his house."

"It is, perhaps, too early to refer to the gas plant as a great success; but we may point to the fact that, although the city has owned it only four or five years, the prices of gas and electricity have both been reduced and the consumption of both has largely increased."

Municipal ownership, in Canada at all events, has not been proved a failure, however it may be with a state-owned business, to which on principle *The Standard* is opposed, for the reason that best results are gotten from private initiative

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