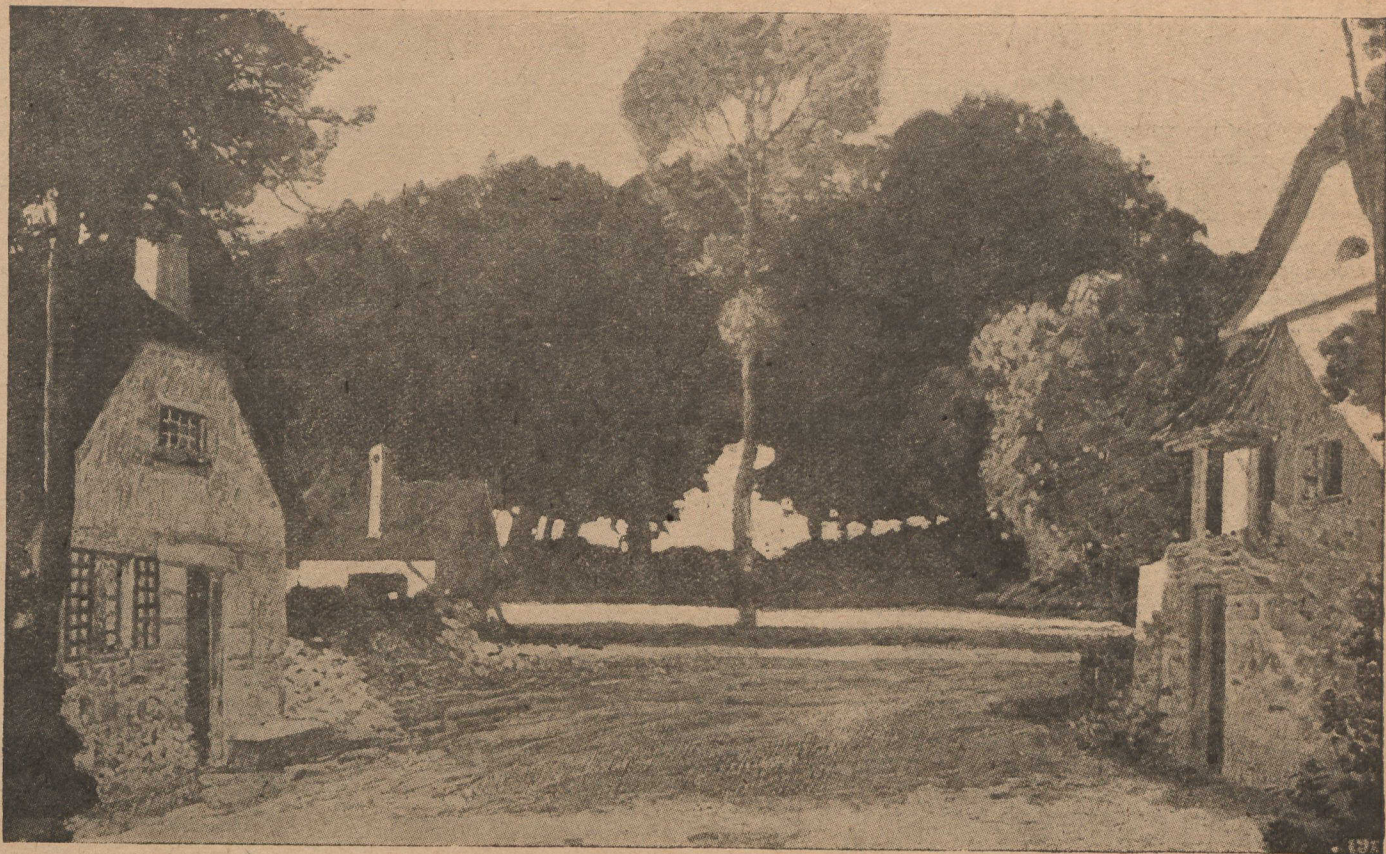


PLAYS

HOW would you like to see a bevy of ballet-girls come gliding into a stage scene like this? Regretting that The Theatre Magazine camera-man did not include the girls, it is worth pointing out that the scene is one of the most recent decorative masterpieces of Joseph Urban. It was made for Pavlova's ballet Giselle. Urban is a Viennese—his only fault. He is now engaged on sets for three musical productions at the Metropolitan Opera—Faust, Meyerbeer's Prophete and Liszt's St. Elizabeth. Urban sets come high. Not every road company has one. Canada so far has seen but one—the set for Miss Springtime, which opened the new Princess Theatre in Toronto. Of course you can't have a five-act drama all set in scenes so simply beautiful as this. No, Robert Mantell does not carry Urban sets.



A Crisis in the Theatrical World

WAR stress, it is said, has hit the theatre. Some of the leading American managers, says Mr. Hornblow in the Theatre Magazine, are very much wrought up over the situation. They all complain of a serious falling off in theatre attendance. Mr. Brady believes that the theatre is about to undergo one of the most trying periods of its history. "We are," he says, "on the edge of a still panic, and in these circumstances it is only natural that the theatre as a luxury should be among the first to suffer. It is facing a period of re-adjustment as the result of the war"; and he adds, "New York, in my opinion, has about twice as many theatres as it can support."

In his last remark, Mr. Brady seems to have stumbled upon the crux of the matter. In order to keep their stages occupied all the time, the managers are compelled to literally shovel on plays, no matter how poor they may be. The result is a huge crop of failures. You don't find Mr. Belasco among the calamity howlers. Why? Because he is one of the few theatre managers in this country who knows his business from the box-office to the stage door. He doesn't pitchfork plays on to the stage. He takes his time in selecting them, takes a year to rehearse them, and in consequence rarely has a failure.

This is the secret of the theatrical depression today. Too many theatres, too many slipshod productions, too many managers who don't manage. Give the public what the public wants, and we shall hear less about empty seats in the theatres.

Vaudeville Argot

PROBABLY no branch of the amusement world has as its members, and draws to itself as audiences, a group of persons quite so theatrically sophisticated as does the two-a-day, sometimes called vaudeville. The slang of the vaudeville performer is the most up-to-date in the world; probably nine-tenths of this country's popular slang expressions, and even a larger percentage of its theatrical expressions, have come out of vaudeville, says a writer in the New York Sunday Times.

These expressions, in turn, are themselves divided into two classes—those which are peculiar to vaudeville, and those which can be applied equally to the other branches of the amusement world. Thus, if you are an actor and the audience, should "walk out on you"—that is, leave the theatre before your portion of the entertainment is concluded—it is obvious that they are privileged to do so whether you are a vaudeville performer or an actor in the legitimate.

Belle Baker, let us say, meets a school-girl friend

on Broadway. Being asked her destination, she replies:

"I am on my way to the United Booking Offices to see Eddie Darling about my engagements in the Keith houses."

Miss Baker then meets that sprightly juvenile, Frank Carter, who queries:

"Where away, Belle?"

Miss Baker, relapsing to the vaudeville vernacular, replies:

"I'm vamping up to Eddie Darling's. I never split the headline with any bill-topper before, but it looks as though Bernhardt has got the Indian sign on me. I'm goin' up to tell Darling and George Gottlieb that I'll run second to her at the Palace next week."

"Got any open time, Belle?"

"Nope. Booked solid and no pink slips for yours truly."

"George Le Maire lamped your turn at the Colonial and says you have a sure-fire routine, Belle. Says you were knockin' 'em out of their seats."

"Well, they ain't walkin' out on me, I'll say that. I can hold down any spot they hand me."

Miss Baker has been telling Mr. Carter that she is a headliner of such magnitude that she must either head a programme absolutely alone or she will not play, but that in the case of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, with whom she has been asked to work on the same bill at the Palace, she will make an exception and take second headline position, known technically as "middle liner." She also conveyed the information that she had no idle weeks in sight, and that in her case no cancellation notices (pink slips used in the U. B. O.) would be handed her. Mr. Carter made it plain to her that a performer of much discernment had viewed her act and approved it, her "routine" (material and its arrangement) being excellent.

One sometimes hears an artist spoken of in public as a "performer." Now, in vaudeville that is a word not to be lightly spoken. Just because an artist is on the stage he or she is by no means entitled to be called a performer. That term applies only to finished, resourceful, technically expert men and women of the stage. It is a great compliment when a veteran refers to a younger artist as a performer.

Motion-Picture Christmas Present

TEN years ago on Christmas Eve a young man stood in Union Square South and looked across the street. The tardy Christmas shopper who stopped to turn his head in the direction of the young man's gaze saw, on the other side of the street, a line of yellow incandescent lights half circling the arch of a small store doorway and just inside, a row of upright slot machines—the sort you used to drop a penny in to see "The Wonders of the

Orient." In this way he begins a very interesting article in The Theatre.

Seventeen years before that time he had first set foot in America, a boy sixteen years old. The succeeding years were marvelous ones to the lad from Hungary. Step by step he had lifted himself from poverty to a position in the world, to become the associate of amusement kings, the owner of a chain of arcade shows in New York and eastern cities. And now as he gazed, he saw the end of that magic day of penny amusement and his eye caught the flicker of a film. In that Christmas-tide was born his faith in motion pictures, a faith that grows and grows just as the photoplay has grown so wonderfully—but a faith that is always just a step or two ahead,—the faith of Adolph Zukor.

Nine years ago on Christmas Eve, Adolph Zukor looked into the past. The penny arcade had passed away and in its stead there was the "store" shows of the picture-plays, a big chain of which he owned with Marcus Loew.

Eight years ago on Christmas Eve, Adolph Zukor entertained a doubt as a Yuletide guest. It was just a little doubt, frail, unassertive, an object of disdain to all but him. That doubt was based on the utter mediocrity of the picture plays then being made and shown.

Adolph Zukor's doubt was that the business could long survive if the public was continually fed with such indigestible, cheap, one and two-reel films. It took a year for him to learn that he was alone with his doubt, a year of earnest appeals to picture producers, a year that brought no answer from the men behind the films. The times needed a man whose ideals for better pictures could be backed by business sagacity and that amount of genius which comes from taking pains.

On Christmas Eve six years ago such a man gave the picture producers a Christmas-present they didn't want. It was the ultimatum that has long been famous in the picture world—that if the producers of the celluloid drama did not give him better pictures, he would make them himself. It was a considerable Christmas-present to hand to the producers—that ultimatum, but Adolph Zukor stuck to his gift and in that moment the feature-play of motion-pictures was born.

Mr. Zukor approached several Broadway managers with his idea of presenting the big stars of the legitimate drama in their various stage successes on the screen. His idea was scoffed at by the very men now following in his lead. But he did not lose courage and finally after a great deal of persuasion from this young picture exhibitor, Daniel Frohman's co-operation was obtained. Thus the Famous Players' Film Company came into being, born of that Christmas-present of Adolph Zukor's only half a dozen years ago.