

# MAUGHAM PRAISES OUR PLAYWRIGHTS

American Drama Admirable for  
Its Freshness of Material,  
Says English Author.

## SPLENDID YOUNG ACTRESSES

Success Comes to Writers Here Be-  
cause They Are Not Ham-  
pered by Precedent.

It became generally known only last night that W. Somerset Maugham, the English playwright, who came to New York on Nov. 15 to attend Miss Billie Burke's first performance of his play, "The Land of Promise," had very quietly left the country on Saturday morning, sailing on the George Washington of the North German Lloyd Line. A host of social entertainments in his honor, beginning almost with his arrival, quickly proved Mr. Maugham the most socially popular English playwright that has visited America in years, and his departure is as much of a disappointment as a surprise to social New York. But Mr. Maugham's sudden departure was hastened by Charles Frohman's decision to wait no longer for the London duplication of "The Land of Promise," originally scheduled for first presentation at the Duke of York's Theatre during the Easter holidays. The success of the piece at the Lyceum Theatre, however, precludes all possibility of Miss Burke appearing in the same part in London, so that Mr. Maugham has hurried home to find a substitute for the London version of his play.

Edward Sheldon, Harrison Rhodes, and Avery Hopwood were among the American playwrights who saw Mr. Maugham safely aboard the George Washington. Mr. Hopwood, in fact, accompanied Mr. Maugham as a fellow passenger, sailing for Germany. Before his departure Mr. Maugham gave the following interview, the only one obtained with him during his stay:

"I have never so hugely enjoyed a month's stay in any modern city—and I believe I have been in them all—as the weeks I have just passed in and about New York. It has been a most satisfying and stimulating experience from every point of view. The theatre here is so rich in impressions, especially for one who comes with an outside point of view. The native American play is an admirable product for three reasons—for the freshness of its material, the veracity of its representation, and its splendid variety of speed in performance, and, of course, the greatest of these is freshness of material, for new matter put upon the stage is to the theatre what new blood is to the human body.

### Lauds American Democracy.

"For these virtues in native playwriting I really believe America has to thank nothing else than American democracy, but by democracy I mean democratic taste in the selection and the use of material for playmaking, and a democratic hospitality on the part of audiences to give just as respectful a hearing to the author who is an obscure nobody as to an established celebrity. Your democratic search for material for plays is splendidly liberalizing to the whole craft of playwriting, for it finds plots in stones, comedies in running brooks, and plays in everything; it does not stipulate, as in the old days of the craft, that the material of a play shall be thus and so; that it shall be ordered and arranged this wise and that, and that in its final form it shall take any particular shape; but rather it sensibly goes on the assumption that any or all human character in conflict with environment, thrifflily manipulated in writing, will generate a good play, serious or comic, as the matter in hand may be.

"Always most is done for the theatre and for playwriting by the mind fertile in ideas, but unhampered by precedents; that is, the man who does the unusual and striking thing—his very amateur lack of so-called technical equipment lends freshness to every character or plot he touches. Within the last month I have seen American plays that have, each in its own way, smashed dozens of supposedly ironclad laws for playwriting. These plays have been by writers whose work succeeds because they fortunately do not know that it has always been a rule that no play, in performance, must ever deceive its public, or they have been plays by writers whose hands were never stayed by such other old-fashioned laws as that there must never be an empty stage during a performance, that every entrance and exit of every character must be accounted for, that any and all of the dramatic unities need be observed, that consistency of characters can no more reasonably be demanded of the theatre than of life, or that one may not ever interchange media, comedy with farce or farce even with tragedy, in the composition of a play.

"In short, the splendid technical fact recognized by American playwrights—and in fact by the best playwrights the world over—is that there is no such thing as a technique of the drama. There are as many techniques as there are successful plays; just as there are as many audiences as there are seats in a theatre. Every plot calls for its own technique. The methods employed in the making of one play are no more likely to succeed in the making of another than that my clothes are apt to fit you. Plays are concerned with the objective in life; the subjective has its place, but it must always be subordinate, as in life. But it is no more possible to expect a given set of laws for playwriting to work out in the dramatic or comic molding of one mass of objective plot matter as well as with another as it is to expect that any two given individuals in life can be assumed to act precisely the same, even under the same circumstances. The only sound law of playwriting that I know—and I have been highly gratified at seeing it so thoroughly practiced in America—is this: Given something to write about, let there be just a little loss between the ideas in your head and the expression of those ideas on paper; that is all there is to sound writing of any kind.

### Many Talented Actresses Here.

"In truth, I should add that in one particular American playwrights have luck on their side. Your stage is extremely rich in highly vitalized, keenly sensitive, intelligent acting material, especially for female rôles. The London stage is almost literally impoverished of what on the American stage seems most plentiful; namely, finely attuned, alertly intelligent, natural young actresses. Of promising young 'leading women,' as you call them over here, in London we have almost none; I mean, young women with expressive faces,

agile minds and even stage deportment, who sensibly realize that they act most and best when they act least. Temperamentally, of course, Americans are as thoroughly a people of the theatre and for the theatre as the over-restrained English are less suited to the theatre because emotional at too low an ebb. English life, last of all expressing itself in objective action, contributes as little to the theatre in plot material as the average Englishman, expressing himself last of all in objective movement, can offer objective acting. Hence, the theatre is a habit in America; whereas, in England it is a rare event. An American lives, usually talks, in a highly vitalized dramatic or comic objective fashion perfectly suitable to the medium of the theatre. An Englishman, repressing, sometimes never expressing, himself outwardly, is not essentially a character for the theatre. In short, the one nationality is as essentially objective in its life as the other is subjective.

"As it is out of the objective in life that plays are made, your American life has more drama and comedy to the square inch than English life has to the square mile. That is why, to be frank with you, I deliberately stepped from England to North America in search of the material that I have employed in 'The Land of Promise.' As an Englishman, I had not quite the courage to take my material directly out of life in the States, but I knew nobody would think it presumptuous of me to take material from Canada and the Northwest, an English Dominion.

"The outcome almost makes me feel like an American playwright, for I can express unstinted gratitude for the splendid success accorded what I have always wished to do—a play depicting of life objectively expressed. And, again, I feel myself an American playwright in the possession of such a splendidly attuned, keenly intelligent actress of fine range for the leading part as Miss Billie Burke—a type I wish we had more of in England. I sail to put on the play in London. My only regret is that Miss Burke and her company are not sailing with me. I know that the part will never be so satisfyingly played for me by any other English-speaking actress."

## THE FRIENDS OF MUSIC.

Second Concert at Ritz-Carlton Offers a Programme of Distinction.

The organization calling itself the Society of Friends of Music gave its second concert yesterday afternoon in the ballroom of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and this concert, like its first, a month ago, had real distinction to a degree that justified the attempt of the society to add something to the already overflowing supply of music in New York, because of its unusual quality.

The programme, which was in truth somewhat too long, began with a performance of Brahms's "Liebeslieder" waltzes, for four voices and piano-forte, by Arthur Whiting and his University Quartet, Mrs. Rabold and Mrs. Jones and Messrs. Wheeler and Jahn. The waltzes were composed for voices and accompaniment by two players on the piano, but Mr. Whiting uses an accompaniment condensed for one, and has made a selection not too long from the two sets of waltzes that gives delightful contrast, and ends with the "epilogue" of the second set. The waltzes are fascinating, entrancingly melodious, and of a wide variety of mood—brilliant, gay, ironical, now and again with a passing shadow of greater seriousness. And the composer has exhibited an astonishing ingenuity in employing the waltz rhythm so as to avoid monotony of effect. Mr. Whiting and the singers have entered fully into the spirit of the music, and they give it with an immense gusto, a contagious warmth of enthusiasm, and a finished perfection of delivery.

The Longy New York Modern Chamber Music Organization—a little fluttering to the city it has so agreeably invaded—gave the rest of the programme, a Kammer Sinfonie, Op. 14, by Kurt Striegler, for wind instruments and string quintet, and Dvorak's Serenade, Op. 44, for wind instruments, cello and bass. Striegler's is a name unknown to New York, belonging to a professor of composition at the Leipsic Conservatory; evidently one who has shaken off a good deal of the academic conservatism traditional in that institution, for his music is modern in feeling and in its harmonic structure, not without a good deal of influence from west of the Rhine, yet not aggressively exploiting it. There are grace and a strongly marked execution of mood in much of this music, and the scherzo has a pleasing vivacity. There are also many interesting effects of instrumental timbre and combinations, and the purpose of the "chamber symphony" in keeping the equal balance between the wind and the stringed instruments is skillfully carried out, giving a wholly individual tonal effect. But the four movements, all of them, are too long, developed beyond what the value of their ideas properly warrants, and the listener is wearied with each one of them before it is done.

Dvorak's serenade has a different tonal quality owing to the preponderance of wind instruments. Perhaps it was something in the nature of an experiment. At any rate, the result is engaging, and, while the music is not of the composer's finest, it was quite worth rescuing from oblivion, especially the minuet, with a particularly pretty trio, and the andante. The playing of Mr. Longy and his men in both compositions was of rare excellence.

## PHILHARMONIC CONCERT.

Harold Bauer Plays Saint-Saens's Fourth Piano Concerto.

Mr. Stransky's programme for the Philharmonic Society's concert yesterday afternoon was of a popular character, yet not wanting in distinction, to which Harold Bauer's appearance as soloist contributed much. He began with the overture to Otto Nicolai's comic opera, "The Merry Wives of Windsor," a brilliant and melodious prelude to one of the best of Shakespearean musical settings, at one time a frequent number in programmes of a popular sort, but recently neglected more than it deserved to be. He repeated the "Ballet Suite," by Max Reger, that was played by the Philharmonic Society for the first time in this country on Nov. 20; one of the most accessible of Reger's recent compositions, in which he has dropped or concealed much of his contrapuntal severity, and mollified some of his difficult harmonies, and in which he employs a moderate orchestral apparatus with much skill to gain varied and delicate orchestral tints. The last section of the programme was devoted to a group of orchestral dance pieces of different nations; Hungarian dances by Brahms, Norwegian by Grieg, Spanish by Moszkowski, Slavic by Dvorak, Polish by Scharwenka, and Johann Strauss's Austrian "Wiener Blut."

Mr. Bauer played Saint-Saens's fourth piano concerto in C minor, one that has not of late years appeared often in the repertory of pianists. There is in it something of the sober reserve and reflective quality that marks so much of Saint-Saens's music; yet there is much distinction in it, too, and there is something that Mr. Bauer's finely conceived and beautifully executed conception of it transmitted into poetical charm. There would have been even more, perhaps, if Mr. Stransky had given him a more skillful accompaniment, one that did not at any point lag behind the solo player.

## THEATRICAL NOTES.

Miss Eleanor Gates entertained on Saturday night at her home, 116 West Fifty-ninth Street, in honor of Miss Ellen Glasgow and Miss Mary Austin.

"The Midnight Girl," which is to have a New York production before long under the Shubert management, will be seen for the first time in the present English version at the Providence Opera House on Jan. 19. The company includes George MacFarlane, Viola Gillette, Margaret Romaine, Eva Fallon, Louise Kelley, Juliette Lange, Paul Kerr, Clarence Harvey, George A. Schiller, Teddy Webb, George White, Denman Mahay, Madison Smith, and Harry MacDonough.

A new duet for Carl Gantvoort and Erne Rogers will be sung by them in the second act of "Iola" for the first time in the Longacre Theatre to-night. An octette will also be introduced in the same act for the first time this evening by the Misses Erne Rogers, Hazel Kirke, May Allison, and Maria Spears and the Messrs. Carl Gantvoort, Leslie Gaze, Roydon Keith, and Rexford Kendrick.

Arrangements were completed on Saturday with the United Booking Office for the first appearance in vaudeville of Ethel Jackson, the original "Merry Widow" in this country. Miss Jackson will make her first appearance in the variety theatres next Monday at the Orpheum Theatre, Brooklyn.