

SEÑORITAS OF PASADENA'S COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE

WHAT'S AN USHER?

By MEDORA CLARK

IT'S a long leap from the buxom duenna of the Comedie Francaise to the smiling senorita of the new Community Playhouse in Pasadena—so long that it is hard to realize that the two function alike. There are many things that we don't do well in this country but running a theatre isn't one of them. Some one, a long time ago, casting an efficient American eye critically over the European system, pained with a finger on the continental pour-boire and said wisely "that must go." That elimination in America made the excursion to the left aisle, seventh row, just after the raising of the curtain, a pleasant preliminary instead of a nightmare and put us on a new basis—salaries for everyone, ushers included.

Our first theatres were a riot of gold, ambitious if misguided. Women were still retiring and men plentiful so we placed them at the aisles of our theatres and as they were servants, we put them in liveries—blue or red bound with gold, but little gold and much blue and red.

Then we began to embellish our theatres and their aisles; we put in women. And we embellished them. With true American impulse we overdid the thing until the ushers outdistanced not only the theatre but the performance. Now we have begun on a retrogressive route in search of our equilibrium. And in southern California we seem to have found it in the costumes of the señoritas of the Playhouse.

It is difficult to say just how so satisfying an effect is produced; one can scarcely analyze such successful simplicity. They are Spanish—not ultra-Spanish; no boleros, no tassels, no fringe, no short satin skirts, no red heels; not even combs nor earrings. Such accessories cost money and the Playhouse costumes were evolved from mist. But they are harmonious, gala—perhaps the rose in the hair does that—and informal enough to achieve a note of welcome.

They so charmed me that I was eager to learn their history—or their evolution. It was the usual Playhouse story, each one to whom I was sent modestly disclaiming all credit.

"Don't talk to me," protested Marion Brackenridge, "it was Loretta Japs; she was really wonderful. She —"

"But didn't you suggest the silhouette—the mass, so to speak?" I persisted. She is a sculptor and I felt a certain swing in the design.

"Well, I knew," she admitted, "that Mr. Clark wanted long full skirts and that he wanted the shawls—but we couldn't have long ones because they must be practical, so we chose the shawls of Andalusia."

"Did you know about shawls—and Spanish provinces?" I pressed.



THE USHERS OF THE PASADENA COMMUNITY PLAY HOUSE IN THEIR COSTUMES OF ANDALUSIA. TWO PHOTOGRAPHS BY MR. ALSON CLARK TAKEN WITH AN ACROMATIC LENS.

"No, but I went to the libraries and searched and searched, and made drawings, and shopped and shopped until I haggled over prices and saw samples in my sleep."

"They did take a scandalous amount of material for this abbreviated age—didn't they?" I apologized, "but how did you make them so mellow a part of the theatre without having them insipid?"

"We talked and talked; and tried out such a lot before we finally decided. We had Mr. Clark's curtain always in mind and we worked toward it; we wanted them surely to harmonize with it in color. And we finally chose a cross between—peasant and nobility," she smiled, "do you like them?" And then with a pride of her particular achievement—perhaps the part that had meant most struggle—"I thought the sleeves were good; the two little ruffles just under the shawl. They are sort of —"

We looked at each other for a word. "Feminine?" I suggested.

"I think the whole costume is that," she summed.

"Feminine," I reflected afterward, as I crossed the flagstones of the patio; that may be it. But that's not all.

I lingered in front of one of the patio shops; it's glorious display was soothing to look at and made an inspiring spot in which to philosophize. Feminine, that isn't all, I pursued; the fact that they searched and searched and searched—intelligent industry—and that they drew and drew—art combined with patience—and that they talked it over—clearheaded cooperation—and that no one claimed the credit—the joy of work with no thought of recompense other than the pleasure that it might give some one: these are the things that made the costumes. They are the things that made me have to write about them. And for want of a better term—in that futile attempt to name them, I am forced to call so intangible a quality, "community spirit."

THE COMMUNITY

By J. W. MORIN

THE thing that seems to distinguish latter day social conditions is a more general and practical application of the proposition that the individual's real life is not lived of and for himself alone but develops in contact and consistency with the community life. The political, educational and even the industrial achievements of the Anglo-Saxon race which have given it the world leadership, rest in the peculiar affinity of the mind of this race for the conception and application of the rule that the complete supremacy of true community interest should prevail as contrasted with the individualistic interpretation of life.

In establishing therefore the first elementary principal of a community playhouse if it is designed to be a stimulant to true community thought development, it must be declared that first the new institution must be made of and by the community. If this is true in regard to the institution to begin with, the beginning is right, for the community like everything else needs a manifestation of itself. Then if the play is of the people (or the community) the better play it is, the finer the result, but if it be such a fine play that the community on the average will not go to see it should be recognized that too great a step has been taken in acceleration of the community theatre development for as in all other fields of endeavor, including politics and social advance, there can be no leadership of much practical avail, except the leadership



remain in contact with those who are led. A community playhouse cannot live in a community under a leadership which is so far in advance of the average taste of the community that it can be described as born out of its time. A community playhouse whether it be simple or complex is relatively a very expensive thing to maintain and for a few to sustain such a pseudo community institution otherwise than by general community financial and moral support will in the long run inevitably prove an impossible burden. This institution in Pasadena so far has enjoyed consistent support in its maintenance from hundreds of its friends and followers and it is the policy of those in charge of its direction that it were better that it should have a degree of support from hundreds than it should have equal or better support from a few. The leadership of a playhouse movement of this type must take the bulk of the people just as they are found in average large quantities and depend upon them for the various types of work including the work of the cast and for a paying audience. It may be assumed if the play is popular it is pretty nearly true to type as a community playhouse product. The only advance therefore in the type or grade of plays which may be frequently presented consistent with the solvency of the playhouse movement is in a corresponding advance in the interest of the community patrons or in their patience with the efforts of the amateur, if one prefers to express it in that way. This advance in faith and in patience the local playhouse institution has enjoyed in a very appreciable degree in recent years.

In communities where local conditions of leisure, genius and idealism are relatively an important factor, a community playhouse may go very far both in a material and in an ideal sense. In these exceptional communities of the Southwest with the infinite personal resources of spirit and genius, the governing Board has felt justified by its experiments in adopting a policy that the institution can go a few steps beyond the lines of least resistance. In other words while its primary business is of and with the community, for its amusement and general welfare, it is also justified in exhibiting an educational phase and an experimental phase.

These two additional phases or objectives have justified the Board in asking of the community some measure of financial support in the nature of sustaining donations for operation (as well as construction) because the institution proposes and endeavors to be more than a place of amusement, even though it be a Simon pure community institution for amusement. Education is notoriously expensive and experiment is even more so. It has in fact to be endowed and the frontier of experiment in education is sometimes termed a foundation. The Carnegie foundation for example has taken official recognition of the importance of the community playhouse objectives to society by subsidizing one such institution in the Southwest (though it does not happen to be in Pasadena) to a large extent.

English literature alone abounds in worthwhile drama which the professional stage will not and can not afford to produce and out-



CONCRETE AND BRICK CAN BE MADE BEAUTIFUL. MR. ALSON CLARK SETTING THE BRICKS FOR THE GRILL AS HE HAD SEEN ONE IN MEXICO.

side of an occasional school effort, if the professional producer cannot attempt this class of play, it will remain unplayed due to the inherent risk of production expense. A deserving play unplayed is not of much value to the rank and file of the community as a play. Our local institution has produced in all probability more so called classics, exceptional or educational types of plays by recognized authors in less than seven years than have been produced in all the professional theatres of California since the conquest of California from Mexico. So much for the educational importance of the institution as a justification for its existence, and for its claim for a reasonable subsidy if necessary for those who can assist it.

On its experimental side (in a restricted sense) it can be explained that the professional theatre being without government aid in the United States must remain solvent to live and seldom is there any disposition therefore for it to depart from the minimum conventional production methods. The playhouse, however, seems justified in the assumption that it is called upon to present its plays with all the sincerity of physical detail, properties and costumes and light and are consistent with its financial means and a relatively larger production expense is inevitable. It results in such effective presentation of the environment for the actor as often to leave impressions of lasting character with the audience, as well as to assist greatly in the effectiveness of illusion, which is so much the special object of the spoken drama.