

GOOD COMPANY IN HERNE'S NEW PLAY.

"Sag Harbor" Opens Oscar Hammerstein's New Republic Theatre.

One scarce knows which to deal with first in the way of criticism, condemnation and praise as regards the opening of the Theatre Republic and the metropolitan debut of "Sag Harbor." Both have done wonderfully well in most respects, but Oscar Hammerstein has built some atrocious entrances to his new play house, while James A. Herne has builded some very faulty dramatic situations. Mr. Hammerstein has atoned for his error by giving to the city, so far as interior decorations go, what is perhaps its prettiest theatre; while Mr. Herne has done penance for his sin by presenting for public inspection and approval a band of players so perfectly trained and a dialogue so witty as to save an otherwise mediocre drama.

Hammerstein's theatre is of white and gold and green, with a marvellous dome and some extremely handsome plastic work. It smelt very painty last night from much varnish and turpentine. Herne's play is of varying shades, with some characters which will become famous in dramatic history. It smelt moist from many unnecessary tears and sobbing.

Both Hammerstein and Herne can remedy the defects so noticeable in their productions last evening, I hope, and when they have done so there will be few rivals left for them in the land. Both are masters—Hammerstein of the art of theatre construction, and Herne of the art of stage management.

Having thus compared the achievements of the two men in a manner which I trust is not odious, let me turn my attention to Herne's play, leaving Hammerstein to enjoy the praise which will surely be accorded the beauty of his theatre.

"Sag Harbor" is not nearly so good as "Shore Acres"—there I go again with those comparisons—but the acting saved it. Had it not been for the acting it would have been almost as bad as "Cupid Outwits Adam" in many respects. This is a cruel thing to say and will possibly wound the pride of Mr. Herne as a playwright, but, really, the plot was so old and stilted and uninteresting, that it would be unkind to speak falsely to this veteran even were it a white lie, cloaked in a mantle of charity. Then, too, it is long drawn out and lacks action. Herne can, I know, get to work and invent a few new situations, cut out a lot of tiresome dialogue, and finally have a play which should prove almost as successful as his splendid and powerful "Shore Acres."

For instance, there was no reason why the scene between his daughter Chrystal and young Lionel Barrymore in the last act should have consumed more than a minute's time. I doubt if it had any right in the play at all, being incongruous and quite unlike what would be tolerated by Long Island Sound society as most men have found it. Many of the audience seemed to enjoy it, but to my mind it was distinctly displeasing, and I strongly suspect was written in by the father playwright in order to give the elder child of his bosom a chance. The younger child, Julie, had been given the damp and sullen role of the weeping heroine; had grabbed off all the dra-



matic situations; and so popper had written in something for Chrystal in order to keep peace in the family. If I were Mr. Herne I would separate those daughters. It is never wise to have too large an aggregation of offspring mixing up together artistically. It is a good deal like pouring the two sedlitz powders in one glass.

Herne, in his old age, has come to some rather risqué jokes in his play writing, but his audience last night regarded them as if they were quotations from that excellent Sabbath school publication called "The Young Christian Soldier; or, The Carrier Dove."

One character was made to remark that a lady had recently died at Jellip who was said to be a descendant of Capt. Kidd's crew; while another gentleman, bemoaning the fact that, although he was married he was childless, was assured by one of the ladies that Rome wasn't built in a day. These merry quips were received with great laughter and apparently corrupted no one.

The magnificent and studious training which Herne gives all players who surround him was evident at all times—all save in the case of the two little Herne girls, who I think should have made way to more forceful and experienced actors.

The playing of Mr. Herne was wonderfully clever. He is an artist in character-roles almost incomparable. But equally sharing with him the honors was W. T. Hodge, an actor whom I do not now recall as ever having seen play before. He personated the character of a sign painter at Sag Harbor who was constantly falling in love and ever jealous. It was as delightful a bit of

acting as has been seen in New York in years and deserved every bit of the continued applause and laughter it received. My advice to managers is this: Keep your eyes on Hodge!

Mr. Frank Monroe also did some clever work. It was natural, forceful and convincing. I did not care so much for the work of either Forrest Robinson or Lionel Barrymore—probably because it was of that moaning, sighing, I-could-kill-you-brother variety. But they both did well in the indifferent parts Mr. Herne created for them.

Mrs. Sol Smith, who, it has been rumored, played in the original production of "Antigone," was very pleasing as the widow of a long-extinct whaling captain, and Marion Abbott in her courting scene with Mr. Herne gave every evidence of great aptitude for refined comedy. Every character invented and trained by Mr. Herne stood out like a cameo, and it made of what might have been a failure a true and honest success.

One thing is certain—you can't say you have seen the good things of the year unless you have witnessed "Sag Harbor," and you can't be foolish enough to refrain from viewing the inside of that Theatre Republic.

WILLIAM RAYMOND BILL.

A MILLION DOLLARS.