

MISS ETHEL BARRYMORE IN "COUSIN KATE"

A Teacup and Saucer Romeo and Juliet Play by H. H. Davies.

A Pleasantly Successful Opening of the Beautiful New Hudson Theatre.

"There certainly are compensations in being old!" exclaimed Miss Ethel Barrymore, as Cousin Kate last night at the beautiful new Hudson Theatre. Her hair was braided in a coronet about the top of her head, in a way that was positively middle-aged, though she was only meant to be twenty-nine, but the spirit of girlish well-being was so flush and obvious in her that that shamelessly and admirably friendly first-night audience did nothing but laugh and applaud, and ended by quite breaking up the dialogue, just as they had done at the first night of "Her Own Way," (Miss Barrymore assisting,) when George Lawrence, combing out Miss Maxine Elliott's hair, paid her that pretty compliment about her particular good looks.

It was pretty and cheerful as could be, but when the green and orange and old ivory curtain rang down on the play the saying came back to mind with a new connotation. There certainly are compensations in being old, and when Miss Barrymore has come into them she will give a fuller, more rounded, and far deeper interpretation to such rôles as Cousin Kate. And let us hope—indeed, we know!—she will only be the more beautiful.

Cousin Kate is a novelist. Some people have loved her, and she has loved some people; but, as she whimsically and sadly puts it, "they have never been the same." She has, in consequence, become topsyturvy in her mood, and her novels—witty, worldly novels—are so cynical as to make the curate blench with horror like a Bishop's. But on the train coming up to the first act she has had a semi-Bohemian third-class (as to the train) flirtation with a first-class Irishman, (first-class as to the Irishman,) over her basket lunch, which she shared with him between their knees. It seems to be a sort of fourth love at first sight, and as the Irishman seemed a convert to reciprocity, Cousin Kate is changed in a moment from the cynical lady novelist who shocked the curate into a truly sympathetic exponent of womanhood, who realizes the shallowness of social vogue, and especially of her curate-shocking novels, and wants nothing so much as to love and be beloved.

In the second act it so falls out that she and the Irishman are alone together in an empty house, making tea together over an open fire, during a thunderstorm; and in the prettiest of sentimental love scenes, mixed with graceful, high-class brogue and a daintily graceful fairy tale, their deep flirtation burgeons into love, and their love into spontaneous and passionate declaration. In one way it is a teacup and saucer Romeo and Juliet scene, with the empty house instead of a garden balcony. But in another way it is not at all like Romeo and Juliet, for no sooner has the new and uncurate-shocking Cousin Kate given full rein to her passion than her nine-and-twenty years and her past experience in unrequited love assert themselves, and she has a recrudescence of subtle cynicism and distrust, in which she doubts the sincerity of her lover-at-first-sight; and in a succession of emotions that should sound the depths of a maturely passionate yet misgiving heart she vibrates from the extreme of trepidous womanly shame at her facile capitulation and no less extreme womanly belief and longing.

It is here that Miss Barrymore missed the compensations of age. Light, charming, and sincere as she had been in all the simpler moments, she failed to sound the depth and the complexity of that tortured woman's heart. Her voice vibrated with the resonant color of passion, but it lacked the variety and the acute extremes called for by the lines. What might have been a moment of strong and varied and dramatic acting failed really to convince. It was only a moment, and Miss Barrymore glided speedily back into the part again; but it was the supreme moment, and the defect converted what might have been a triumph into a success.

There was, of course, a complication in the plot. The Irishman, a light-hearted, free, and manly artist of means, had been engaged to Cousin Kate's little cousin, a narrow-shouldered, flat-chested, washed-out pre-Raphael pietist, whose ideals were those of the flabby parsonical curate, (with whom she was unconsciously in love,) and who in her blindness had tried to make over the artistic temperament into the likeness of the curate. Failing in this, there had been a lovers' quarrel, which ended in calling the affair off; and it was while it was off that the Irishman met Cousin Kate on the train.

All this was, of course, known to the audience throughout the first and second acts, but it was only at the end of the polite Romeo and Juliet passage in the second act that Kate became aware of the true state of affairs, and, as the little cousin had persuaded herself it was her duty to sacrifice herself to the artist, Cousin Kate magnanimously pretended to have been only flirting in the search of material for a novel. So there was a situation left for the third and last act.

It was, of course, a foregone conclusion that the cousin would marry the curate, or locum tenens, as he preferred to be called, while novelist Kate was destined for the Irishman artist; and it had been a foregone conclusion since the first ten minutes of the play. But it is a foible of audiences to wish to foresee the end from the beginning, and it must be confessed that the story was so skillfully and evenly handled, with such resources of deft character drawing and polite wit, that it kept the audience full of interest, even of delight, until Mr. Davies had spun out every slender thread into a theatrically complete, if slender, story.

The play is happy in having an informing and pervasive theme. It is the struggle of Christian ideals of duty and self-sacrifice against artistically Bohemian, perhaps pagan, ideals of individual freedom in search of the joy of normal life. It is not to be concealed that this is a deep and

far-reaching subject, worthy of great powers of mind and heart, and demanding of the dramatist full and deep knowledge of men and women. Handled with the logic of the drama, which in its way is as rigid as the logic of Jevon or even of Euclid, it would net a great comedy of modern life.

It is happy for his audiences, perhaps, that Mr. Hubert Henry Davies is not incumbered either with inexorable logic or profound knowledge of life. He has balked his theme by turning his Christian folk into caricatures—delicate and amusing caricatures, to be sure, but still caricatures. The curate is enveloped in an armor of self-righteousness, and at every opening between the plates Mr. Davies thrusts the stiletto of murderous ridicule.

It would have been more seemly, one is inclined to think, if he had sandbagged his locum tenens outright. And the little cousin is a mush of mawkish sentiment, almost too sickly a gruel to be amusing. Mr. Davies's sympathies, like those of his audiences, are all on the side of the la jola de vivre, and the result is a light and evenly amusing comedy. Let us be joyful that there is a theme at all, for that is more than most plays possess!

When Mr. Davies first appeared before us last year in "Cynthia," which Miss Elsie De Wolfe played at the Madison Square, New York showed little taste for his delicate wit, his wholesome if superficial and fantastic turn for character. Since then with "Cousin Kate" and "Mrs. Goring's Necklace" he has made his way into the front rank of the brilliant band of English playwrights. In spite of the weakly fantastic last act of "Cynthia" it was a far more promising play than it generally got credit for. If it had come to us after Mr. Davies's arrival in London it would probably have been far more favorably received. However, the present play is more evenly good, and it discloses the same sure sense of dramatic values, the same easy and unpremeditated wit, the same delicacy in divining agreeable moods of feminine character. It will thus serve better to introduce New York to the new playwright. That it will succeed seems quite beyond question.

The acting was on a very high level. Mr. Grant Stewart was unflinching in the rather thankless part of the caricatured curate, and kept the comic note uppermost so successfully as to make a distinctly favorable impression. As the little cousin of washed-out, putty piety, Miss Beatrice Agnew was capital. It took the audience some time to measure the full virtue of her impersonation, but in her last scene she evoked a spontaneous round of applause. Mrs. Thomas Whiffen was Cousin Kate's aunt, and her sound and ripe art was most heartily applauded.

The part of the young Irish artist is very sympathetic, and affords excellent opportunities for light comedy and ardent love-making. Mr. Bruce McRae was, as always, manly and gentlemanly in his demeanor and finished in his art, though he also fell short in the climax of the second act. But he had excellent lines, and he soon got back his hold. Just before matters are happily adjusted in the last act he says, "When I see me duty and me inclination lookin' the same way, I always begin to suspect meself!" The line as he delivered it brought down the house.

It is impossible to close without a word of rapture on the new playhouse. Its verdant antique, in Graeco Roman marble, silk plush and metal trimmings, harmonizes admirably with the dull old ivory of the proscenium arch, tricked out with the iridescence of fevile glass. The masked lights in the golden house coffers and the moons of opalescent luminaries of the foyer ceiling, the constellations of dull incandescence in the ceiling of the auditorium, all combined to suffuse the house with a rich brilliancy never to be forgotten. No richer and more tasteful auditorium is to be found short of the splendid Hofburg Theater in Vienna, with its old crimson, ivory, and gold.