

THE THEATRE • by George Jean Ames

■ OF THEE I SING, COMRADE—

Popular plays and musical productions come and go in great sweeping trends of thought. Within the memory of even the youngest undergraduate is the recent popularity of sentimental German themes, which was accompanied by a far reaching passion for German lyrics, notably *Zwei Herzen*. But scarcely had the movement gone to seed when the prolonged business depression brought investigations and exposures in our systems which brought forth a plethora of satirical plays ranging from politics and economics to society and religion. Then, finally, just when this new mania appears to have become quite *passe* under a new administration and the shaking down and readjustment of business, and when the stage shows signs of turning to real characterizations with a perennial lyric or two, the Fresh Painters come along in the caboose of the satirical train with *Call Me Comrade*. As though last year's musical comedy were not enough to impress us with Mr. Tobin's ability to satirize when the vogue was at its height it was evidently considered necessary to bring the point home by a second attempt gray and whiskered in many respects. It is no very new or original trick of the art to set the scene in the future, and enact the present. That is the easiest, commonest, and least effective form of satire. It isn't side-splittingly ludicrous, furthermore, to treat a subject in what might be called the reactionary period, or the period just after changes have been effected. To see one of Mr. Tobin's shows is to see them all—all two of them.

Some people seem to have the knack of never failing. Our rising playwright deserves a great deal more praise for getting whatever he goes after than for what he does. *Of Thee I Sing* Tobin! Not only did he write *Call Me Danny* (or whatever it is) but he drew the prize winning poster to advertise the show, from a field of trained and talented amateur artists. Such a versatile man we never saw!

Our only criticism of *Call Me and God Comrade* is that nowhere may we find a bibliography of the dialogue which we feel certain would, if complete, attain magnificent proportions and aid not only us but other comedy devotees to make a more

extensive study and more specific comment on the subject. The author no doubt feels that he has been so long connected with the university that such is no longer necessary. Has it been since 1928, that hardly seems possible; what would we do without files?

I believe it was a little before Tobin's time that the Fresh Painters presented *Wonderful Me* and the *Silver Sabre*. Perhaps some of my readers will remember the refreshing collegiate atmosphere of the former, the yells and Alma Mater of good old Nosami, and the live lyrics. It was a subject that the whole cast knew and could do to perfection. They were as natural on the stage as on their own campus. Perhaps some will remember the novelty and brilliancy of the *Silver Sabre*, the song to Skoda, Evans DeCamp, Bud Lush (alias Donald Burr) Inez Vollrath, Charlie Meitus, and many others. After seven or eight years these are from memory, yet the file is at hand for reference to last year's production, and a good written record of *Call Me When It's Over* may save it for posterity, if they want it.

There is the stock of new and fresh ideas, new to the campus, indeed. What does a college student know about politics and economics first hand, let alone when they are in a swing of events which point in another direction? Let the theatre be a "mirror of a people's prejudices" but let it be timely and apt, new and fresh in idea.

Worthy of mention as the one factor saving the show from utter failure was the unusual quality of the leading voices, Ray Black, Lou Eaton, and Johnny Mason; and the really clever antics of Miss Hahn which stood out amongst a superfluity of superficiality which could hardly be called skillful humorous acting. The lyrics were occasionally good, but will probably not be whistled beyond the campus. Miss Wasmer contributed as much of her own to the show as was natural, but offered enough to call forth this notice. The choruses were fair, although at times the intricacies of the dance made them look like kindergartners teaching each other "Good Morning to You." Painterettes deserves mention, finally, as a new and fresh idea, but especially the name.

■ GLORY BE—Mingled with innumerable benefits and advantages offered both to embryo Thespians and to the student body as a whole by the existence and activities of university dramatic groups, there arises at the same time a tendency toward what Matthew Arnold would call *provincialism*. After all, at an institution as large as the University of Cincinnati and with so many ramifications in its lines of cultural and educational endeavor, dramatics amount to but little more than a coterie. At most, they are only a unit in a structure made up of many other units of even more importance—a brick in the archway, perhaps, but, by no means, the keystone. And yet, the powers that be would have us impressed (judging from various manifestations during the year on the part of the Mummies) with what a close parallel they may maintain with Broadway and the professionals. Such is unfortunate because it only verges on the ridiculous. To Arnold, a constant flow of new and fresh ideas was the important guard from *provincialism*. Where have the Mummies exhibited the presence of new and fresh ideas during the last six years? They are certainly difficult of detection, if there are any. On the contrary, the busy and unsuspecting group seems to think it preferable to hoard a store originally gleaned from the vintage of 1926 or so by Sally Fischer, Ruth Thorpe, Lawrence Levy and their many associates. There is nothing more amusing for the city-bred than to witness the mystified perambulations of the rural resident on his first visit to town. There is nothing more tiring for the bridge expert than to share a hand with the Engineer's Club which would play poker were he not present. No less amusing and tiring is it for the true dramatic connoisseur to attend a production that is an obvious and mediocre attempt on the part of both director and cast to keep up with the high standard of a famous and well received script; one that has even proved difficult of presentation on a professional scale where almost unlimited talent and financial backing were available.

Take the patient, give him a sip of knowledge, exposure to the footlights, let him inhale words of praise of many who like to be in the swim and even of a few

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