

THE PLAY

By J. BROOKS ATKINSON.

Maurice Chevalier, Minstrel.

When the curtain came down at the Fulton last evening after an hour of Maurice Chevalier, no one had any intention of leaving the theatre. The asbestos curtain settled into place very firmly, the house lights came on and it was obvious that the program was concluded. But, as sometimes happens in the theatre, every one sat protestingly in his seat, determined to have more, though it take all night to raise the curtain. And the general indignation worked. Presently M. Chevalier stepped buoyantly from the wings again, sang "Valentine," which all his old cronies expected as a matter of elementary justice, and then a scant hour of superb light entertainment was actually concluded.

Even to landlocked Americans M. Chevalier is no absolute stranger. Last year Chevalier Ziegfeld brought him over from the Parisian boulevards to wear his cocky straw hat and to sing after midnight atop the New Amsterdam, and then the Hollywood patrons of art hurried him further West for their own nefarious kleig-light purposes. Now he is back in New York again (by courtesy, mind you, of Paramount-Famous-Lasky Corporation) burdened with the lush romance of a theme song or two, but with enough of his skimming French ballads to make an hour pass with disheartening rapidity in the theatre. For M. Chevalier has the volatile personality and the expertness of touch that translate ballads into high comedy.

What he does is no great matter, except when its is false to his native art. When he is struggling amiably with "It's criminal how women'll worry a man," or when he is good-humoredly "sweeping the clouds away," you are glad he is at least spared the "fairest flower of Tokio-oki-okio," from "June Moon." For M. Chevalier need not box the compass to be thoroughly delightful. He is French. He is tall and engaging in appearance. His manners are excellent. His smile can turn a kleig-light into a shadow. And with the assistance of a toy hat or a hoop or a quick illuminating gesture he can pick the fable from a ballad concerning the love story of two elephants or the simple facts of life and lift it into radiant comedy. He has the sort of dynamic intelligence that makes Beatrice Lillie's fooling so electric. It is an art, as they say, but it is infinitely more.

Before M. Chevalier appears as the second half of this program, Duke Ellington, the djinn of din, and his colored Cotton Club Orchestra, devote an hour to elaborate devices for making noise. By comparison with this blaring bobbery, Mei Lan-fang's squealing orchestra was rhapsodically melodious. Give Mr. Ellington a familiar tune and his gleaming Negro musicians can rip it apart by sticking a derby hat over the mouth of a horn or thrusting a wad down its brassy throat. But there is Aninias Berry, a Harlem strutter. Just as you have decided to stuff the Cotton Club into your ears, Mr. Berry, in a bespangled dress suit, whirls around rapidly, falls, leaps up again, tears across the stage and grins exuberantly. This seems to be all right.

Bloody Richard.

SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD III, in six acts and fourteen scenes. Settings by Herman Rosse; costumes by William Henry Matthews; revived by the Chicago Civic Shakespeare Society. At the Shubert Theatre.

Richard	Fritz Leiber
Henry VI	Hart Jenks
Edward	Marie Carroll
Duke of York.....	Virginia Stevens
George	Lawrence H. Cecil
Earl of Richmond	Hart Jenks
Duke of Buckingham.....	John Burke
Lord Stanley	Philip Quin
Tressel	Ralph Menzing
Duke of Norfolk.....	Edward Fielding
Earl of Oxford.....	John Crossley
Sir William Catesby.....	Robert Allen
Lord Mayor of London.....	James Neil Jr.
Lieutenant of the tower.....	Grant Gordon
Sir Robert Brakenbury.....	John Forrest
Sir Richard Rateliff.....	Charles Deshelm
Sir James Tyrrel.....	Wilfred Mallory
First murderer.....	Robert Straus
Second murderer	Thayer Roberts
Officer	Claudius Mintz
Guard	Meredith Atwell
Lady Anne	Vera Allen
Duchess of York.....	Kathryn Collier
Queen Elizabeth	Virginia Bronson

In spite of the industrious fitting and joining of the tinkers, "Richard III," which was put on at the Shubert Saturday evening, remains a jumble of horrors, tapering off tediously toward the end. How much of Mr. Leiber's version is Shakespeare, how much is Colley Cibber, how much of it is merely the accumulation of the centuries is the sort of thing people like to talk about to stimulate their self-respect and compete in scholarship. But the blunt fact remains that, aside from its fiendish major characterization, "Richard III" is a play of excessive complications and anti-climax, swimming in blood for half its length, but spouting nothing redder than prosy verse after the murder of the tender princes. It was, they say, tremendously popular during the Elizabethan days, perhaps because gore splashes freely through all the early scenes at the hands of royal gangsters. Even in this humane century the spilling of gore does not vex the box-office. Nor does good playwrighting, which "Richard III" is not. "Shakespeare wrote some sad stuff, but one should not say so," George III cautiously remarked. Perhaps that gentleman was not a mad king after all.

Although the play leaves bloody Richard clutching nothing more substantial than tall talk after he has once succeeded in mounting the throne, he is a mettlesome rascal nevertheless. He is a fiend of awful stature, intellectually and physically restless and as pitiless as a blade of steel. He is a villain to avenge his deformities; he murders and plunders to square his account with dissembling nature who sent him into this breathing world before his time. For the purposes of an exhilarating evening in the theatre the characterization is too thoroughly concrete and too quickly revealed. After his first soliloquy he stands fully described, leaving the rest to action alone. While the action is carrying him on toward the throne, the succession of murders he commits, his ghastly audacity in courting Lady Anne while King Henry's corpse is still on its way to the cemetery and his cynical affectation of piety while by his own trick the Lord Mayor is beseeching him to take the scepter—through all this hugger-mugger of malevolence Richard is a provocative dog. Every one likes to see the devil get his due. But watching him keep it is his job; the rest of us can beg off without doing him injustice.

Being a character of notorious energy, Richard suits Mr. Leiber's talents well and provides one of the best characterizations in the current repertory. Sometimes Mr. Leiber makes him too colloquial by translating his craft as the humors of a rogue rather than the mordant ironies of a fiend. But most of his Richard is forceful and stormy, as forthright as the part. There are good performances by Hart Jenks as the Earl of Richmond, John Burke as Buckingham, Lawrence Cecil as the Duke of Clarence, and Vera Allen as Lady Anne—though the womanly princes of Marie Carroll and Virginia Stevens make you envious of the boy actors of Shakes-

peare's day. The production labors with a profusion of scenes that clip the illusion sharply whenever the curtains are drawn. Even in its improved version "Richard III" retains dramatic deformities. Shakespeare could forget that—willy-nilly—he was writing for immortality.