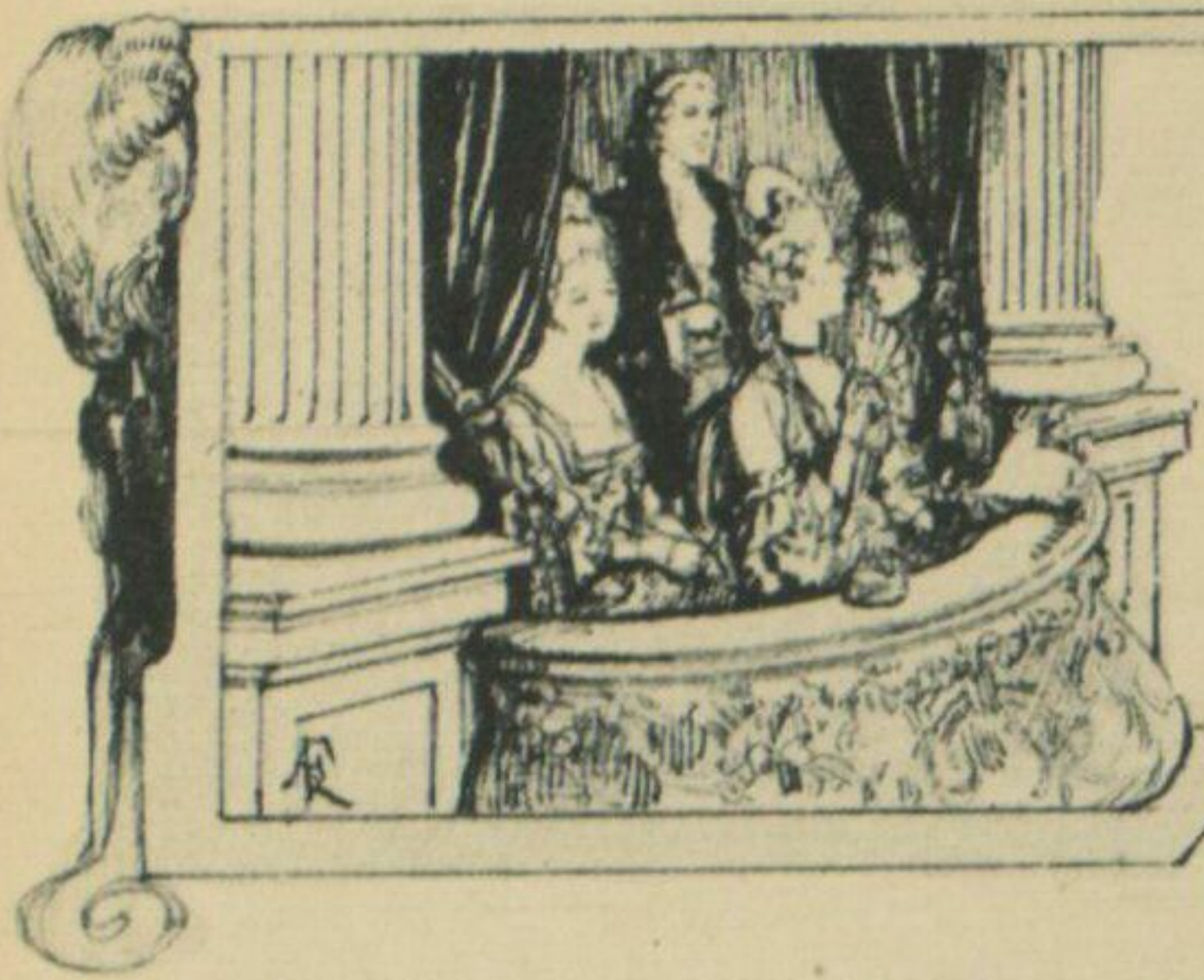


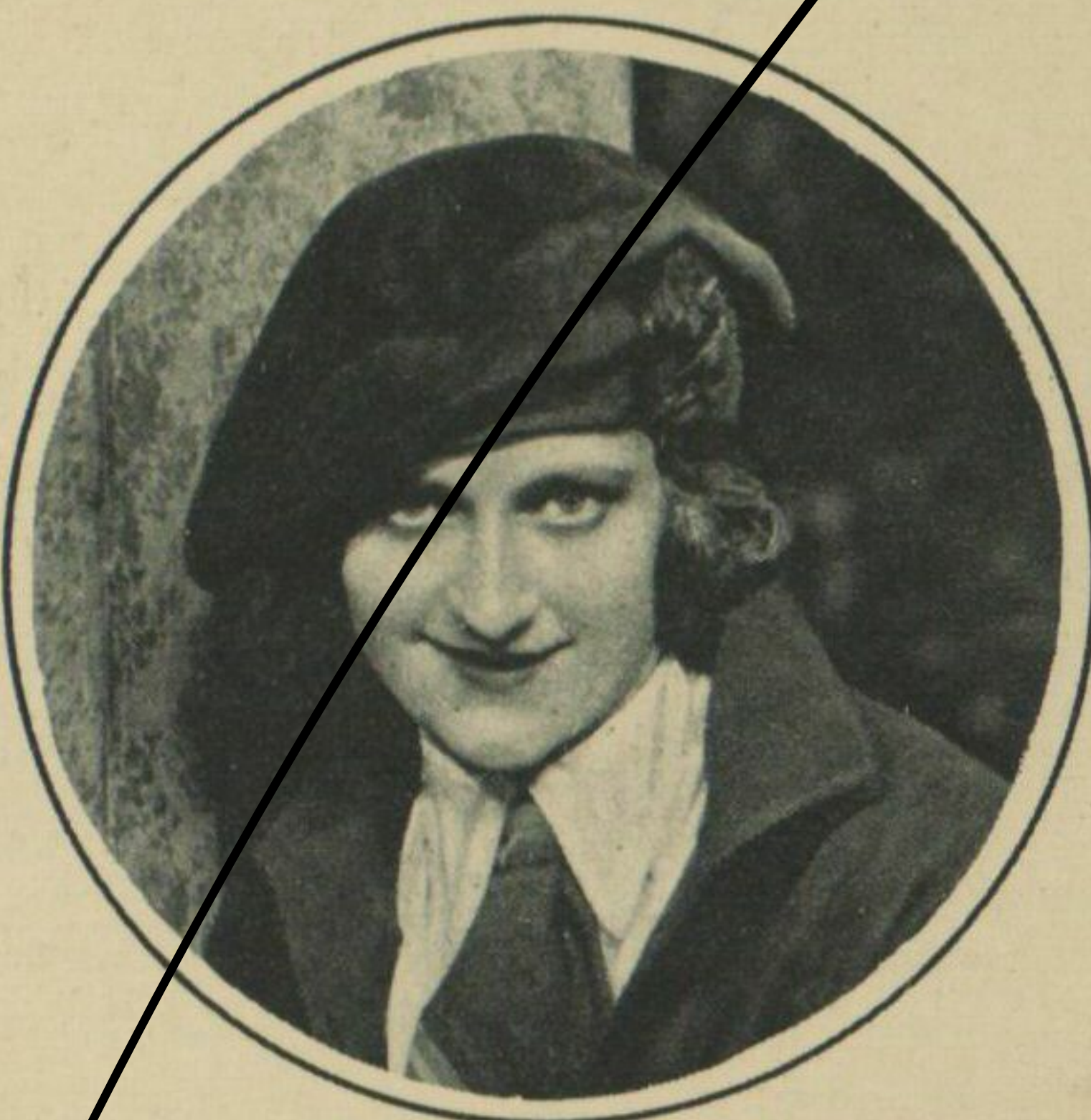
The World of the Theatre.

By J. T. GREIN.



A COMING MAN.—TCHEHOV'S "THREE SISTERS."

WHEN Mr. Frank Vosper, in the memorable performances of Hamlet in modern attire, played the King (as I have never seen the part played before) in every sense of the word, he leapt at once to the front. He has personality—that indefinable gift which to me means the appearance of an individual who arrests general attention and interest. He has technique as well as temperament—the twain which Miss Edith Evans, at the last Critics' Circle dinner, so felicitously described as the horse (temperament) and the rider (technique). His diction, too, is of sterling coinage. He charges his words with meaning, and enunciates them with clarity and precision. Thus, when he joined the Old Vic, as so many well-known actors do in these days, in order to test their strength in Shakespeare and enrich their rhythm of elocution, I expected big things of his Mark Antony. The great oration at Cæsar's bier would reveal all there is in him. Here, indeed, was the touchstone of the three—nay, the four, elements that make an actor and an artist: personality, technique, diction, temperament. I might add to these, characterisation, but that in itself is implied in the foursome. Where there are temperament and personality, characterisation is a natural offspring.



CHARMING DANCER: MISS EDNA BELLONINI AS POLLY PENDLETON, THE HEROINE OF "KID BOOTS" AT THE WINTER GARDEN.

Photographs by Stage Photo. Co.

in aspect a gladiator instead of a majestic triumvir. But we soon forgot the raiment when we heard the man, whose voice sounded like a clarion, who was vibrating with life in every sinew and nerve. We felt the inspiration. Then came, after Brutus's somewhat academic oration, rising from a tumultuous crowd, the address to "bury Cæsar." He began suavely, conciliatingly, as if to appease the seething feelings of his hearers. One hardly felt the mockery at the "honourable man." He would make the mob believe that he valued them as such. It was when he reached the will and its bounties that he let oratory have its fling. He, as it were, played a cat-and-mouse game with the will; he talked around its details, and each time when the word—which implied largesse and promise—cropped up he thrust it at the hearers, as a keeper of a menagerie flings succulent meat at the brutes. It was a play in itself. Climax followed climax in this beguiling of the hungry and the rapacious. And so for the peroration—the tearful wail over Cæsar's body, the crocodile tears of simulation, commingled with the real grief at the loss of a great friend, a great man.

Here Mr. Vosper perhaps did not quite reach the finesse of the tragic note; he was oratorically splendid, but his outburst of sorrow sounded rather forced than heartfelt. There was just a lack of resonance in the plaint. It created doubt. Was this Antony truly heartbroken, or was his outburst the make-believe of "acting"? Within an ace he had us in his grip: a few more sincere notes, and we would have been carried away (as the Romans were). But he left us uncertain; and thus we admired the orator, but could not share the feelings of the man.

Perhaps it was an original reading, selected by design—and it seems defensible, if lessening the tragedy of the occasion. Perhaps it was a spring-board for the final words of the harangue; for these Mr. Vosper launched like a Jupiter Tonans, and sent a thrill through the house. The total effect was great; we felt that, with a little ripening, this young actor is destined to go far. His temperament will propel him. And if, with apologies to Miss Edith Evans, I may give my reading of this oft-uttered, ill-used word, let me explain that I consider temperament as the power to create vibration in others!

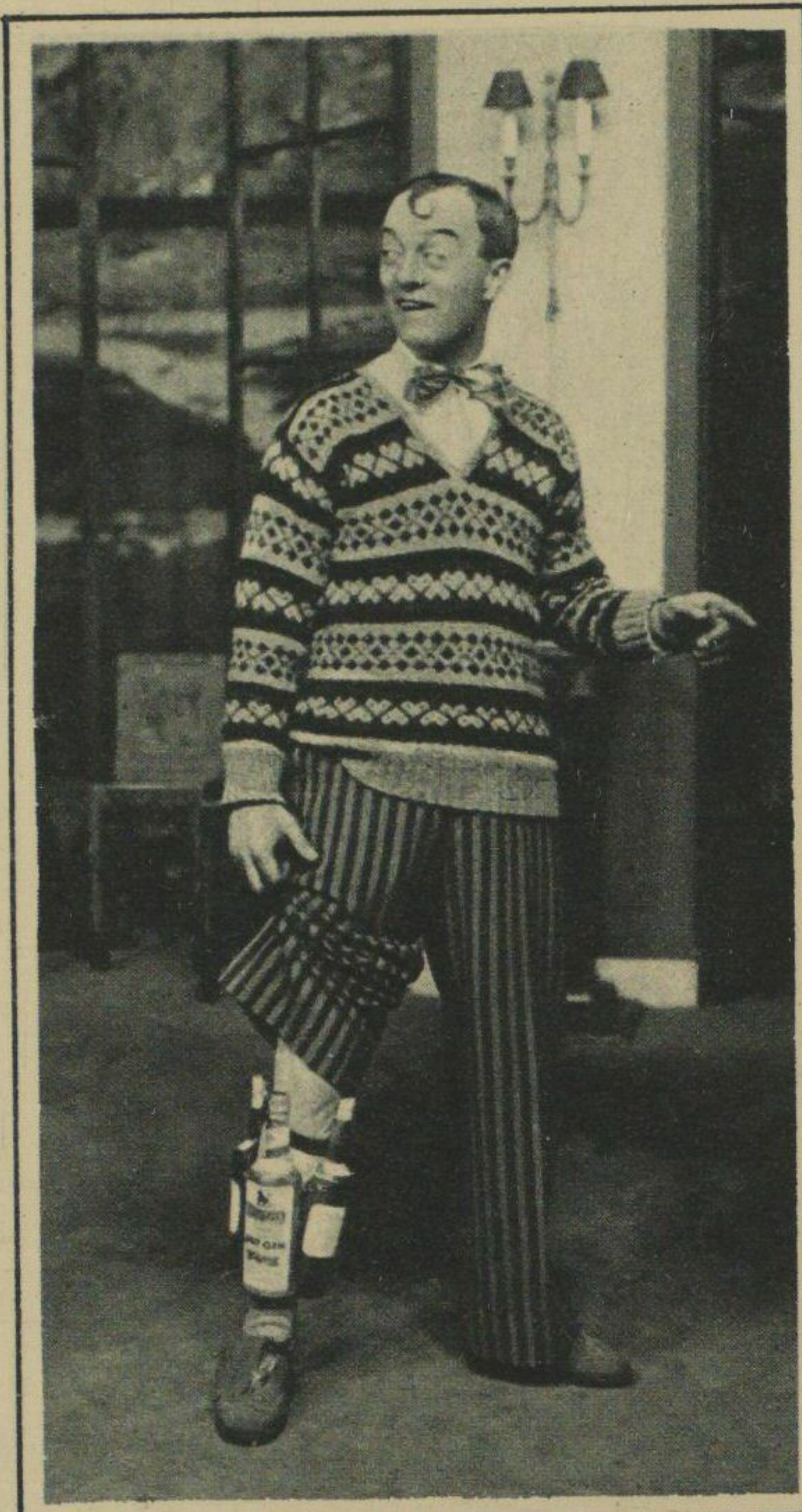
Of all the plays of Tchegov, "The Three Sisters" is the most accessible to us. We need not understand Imperial Russia that was to grasp its meaning, which is laid in one sentence full of ominous portent. "In twenty-five years," says one of the idling characters, "everyone will have to work." That was in 1870—it became true in Russia exactly forty-five years later. Even Tchegov had underestimated the lethargy of his country.

In this family, where life is shown us to the threads of lint, there is but one active agent, and he is a schoolmaster with a very small mind, content with what he has, job, home comfort, wife. For the sake of the last he even accepts the situation when, before his eyes, she embraces the man whom military duty called away and to whom her heart belonged in secrecy. She, Masha, too, is a passive agent like the others—her sister Irina, young, engaged without love, ready to marry for chance, longing to see the Mecca of the land, Moscow; her sister Olga (Miss Mary Sheridan), the widow who has had her time, resigned herself to solitude, and is the ministering angel to her family. These three, who are doomed to eat out their hearts in drab surroundings because none of them has the energy to break the barriers, are infinitely pathetic and drawn by a master's hand with

intense feeling. On them the whole drama is concentrated, although all the other figures, a strange crew of disappointed idealists, of materialists, of moralists, of idlers, are wonderfully attuned to the picture. It is the world where nothing matters or everything has ceased to matter.

All these are unhappy, some in musing, some in great despair, some in lamentation. Nothing in particular happens all the while: life ebbs and flows past them; until, at length, catastrophe slips in and tears their fates asunder. The three sisters remain where they were, but the outlook is more hopeless than ever. They learn to live with death in their soul. The tragedy of the last two acts is poignant in its quiet power; the *Kleinmalerei*—the miniature-painting of the characters—is perfect. Every individual is not only a type, but an entity. The whole scheme is a slice of life otherwise than ours; but we feel its reality; we feel the undercurrent. Some time or other such an existence is bound to be shaken to its foundations. Once again Tchegov was the seer, and his aim was to open his people's eyes to reality and the revolution to come. Alas that he was a prophet in the wilderness whose voice remained unheard till it was too late!

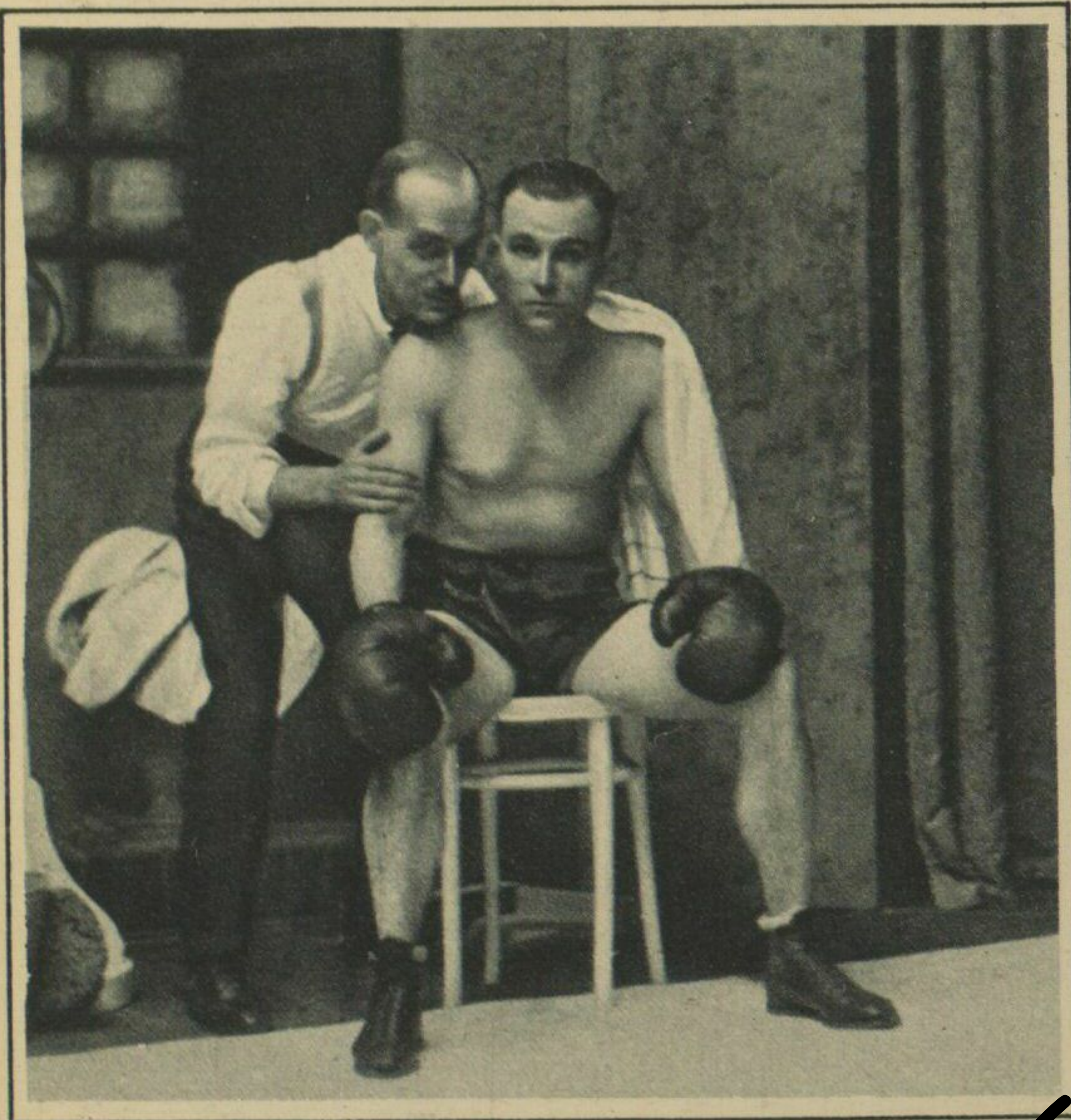
The production of "The Three Sisters" by Komisarjevsky is as a foil to that of "Uncle Vanya": he created the atmosphere; he imbued actors with the spirit of the author. Thus a remarkable ensemble was achieved, and in it, full of fine creations as it was—by Miss Sheridan, a new actress of great promise; by Miss Beatrix Thomson; by Mr. John Gielgud and Mr. Ion Swinley; by one and all too numerous to name—the tragic figure of Miss Margaret Swallow's Masha stood out in prominence. She was the unhappy woman unhappily wedded to the puny-minded schoolmaster; she had given her soul and her heart to the officer, to whom both went out in the hour of parting, but she had not given herself: she was imprisoned by convention and the circumstances. Thus she was left behind with nothing to live for, except memories of a farewell embrace. From the first, Miss Swallow's aloofness and sadness captivated us. She was the incarnation of suffering in silence—of



DOING A LITTLE "BOOT-LEGGING" ON HIS OWN ACCOUNT: MR. LESLIE HENSON AS THE GOLF CLUB CADDIE MASTER IN "KID BOOTS," AT THE WINTER GARDEN.

As Kid Boots, the caddie master at a Florida golf club who adds to his income by a little private bootlegging, Mr. Leslie Henson is the life and soul of the new musical comedy of that name at the Winter Garden Theatre.

she was left behind with nothing to live for, except memories of a farewell embrace. From the first, Miss Swallow's aloofness and sadness captivated us. She was the incarnation of suffering in silence—of



THE "SOCK PEDDLER" LISTENS TO HIS "PILOT" WHO "CRACKS WISE": MR. ROBERT ARMSTRONG (RIGHT) AS A BOXER AND MR. JAMES GLEASON AS HIS MANAGER, IN "IS ZAT SO?" AT THE APOLLO THEATRE.

The humour of "Is Zat So?" an American comedy by James Gleason and Richard Taber, consists in the "back chat" of the two comedians—Mr. Robert Armstrong, as a big, slow, stolid boxer, and the author as his quick-witted little manager who bullies him. A glossary of American slang terms, on the programme, gives "sock peddler" for "prize-fighter," and "sock-peddler's pilot" for "prize-fighter's manager." To "crack wise" is to "speak knowingly."—[Photograph by Pollard Crowther.]

Now as soon as this Mark Antony appeared, something like a breeze rustled across the stage. He stood out; he overshadowed his henchmen—all save the Cassius of Mr. Baliol Holloway, a vigorous figure, powerfully voiced. It seemed as if, all of a sudden, the atmosphere became fraught with omen—as if militancy pervaded the uninspiring debates of the Senators. One felt the contrary spirit of a counter-current. He, as it were, wore his heart upon his sleeve. He impressed us with coming power, and that despite an attire so flamboyant that we saw



A PERFECT ABLUTIONER: MR. CLAUDE HULBERT AS MENLO MANVILLE, THE SOCIAL OBSERVER, IN "KID BOOTS" AT THE WINTER GARDEN, DOING AN AMUSING DANCE OF BATH-ROOM ATTITUDES.

woe, too, written on her countenance, vibrating in her voice, in the lassitude of her movements. It was an unforgettable creation.

Grein, J. T. "The World of the Theatre." *Illustrated London News*, 27 Feb. 1926, p. 366. *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842-2003*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HN3100268451/ILN?u=oxford&sid=bookmark-ILN. Accessed 24 Mar. 2023.