

**HER HUSBAND'S
WIFE: A COMEDY
IN THREE ACTS**

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Her Husband's Wife: A Comedy in Three Acts by A. E. Thomas

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HER HUSBAND'S WIFE



VOLUME VI

The Drama League Series of Plays

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
A. E. THOMAS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WALTER PRICHARD EATON



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1914

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INTRODUCTION

It is never safe to take a serious man too seriously—nor a humorist too lightly. Most of the “serious” dramas of the hour are probably of less consequence than we sometimes, in our enthusiasm, suppose, and the more sprightly plays, even the farces, are often of considerably greater. Glancing back, for instance, over the past decade or two in the American theatre, the memory of many an ambitious and portentously solemn drama is, at best, but hazy, while our recollection of “The College Widow,” racy with its picture of life in a “fresh water” college, of certain comedies by Clyde Fitch, with their brisk etchings of urban butterflies, of some first act by George Cohan, lifted from the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, remains vivid and undimmed. The humorist (always excepting Mr. Shaw!) is seldom concerned with propaganda, nor burdened with a “message.” He has more time to give to his story for the story’s sake, and he is frequently a

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closer observer of individual types and eccentricities, of the play of character upon character, of the humors of the times, which are its manners. The public preference for comedy in the theatre is not wholly due to a distaste for high seriousness; in part at least it is due to the fact that the writers of comedy produce, on the whole, better and more vivid plays.

"Her Husband's Wife" offers, perhaps, a case in point. Though it was written solely to be acted, with no thought of the printed page in mind, it has survived to be printed by virtue of its dramatic integrity. Frankly a whimsical farce, an "entertainment" in the most popular sense, individualizing observation, unforced humor, kindly feeling, a sense for style, preserve it for our more careful attention. It survives because it is a good play.

A. E. Thomas, the author, was born in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts, and was graduated from Brown University with the class of 1894. The following year he was an instructor in English at Brown, while securing his Master's degree. He then took up newspaper work in New York City, laboring in that interesting if not always remunerative vineyard for fifteen years before "Her Husband's Wife,"

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his first play to reach the professional stage, was produced. To be a reporter for fifteen years is to see much. To be a reporter for fifteen years and emerge uncynical and serene, however, is something of an accomplishment. To emerge, furthermore, with a sense for style still keen, and an undimmed zest for invention, is almost worthy of Peter Pan. Mr. Thomas thus emerged with "Her Husband's Wife" in his pocket.

The play was accepted by Henry Miller, who produced it at the Broad Street Theatre, Philadelphia, on February 14, 1910, with the following cast:

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| John Belden | Arthur Lewis |
| Richard Belden | Orme Caldara |
| Stuart Randolph | Robert Warrick |
| Irene Randolph | Laura Hope Crews |
| Emily Ladew | Grace Elliston |
| Maid | Nelly Roland |

Rewritten slightly to make more prominent the part of Uncle John, and to introduce a new character, the Baroness von Marcken, as a foil to John, it was brought to the Garrick Theatre, New York, on May 9th of the same year, with Mr. Miller himself

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playing John, and Mabel Burt the Baroness. It ran in New York, first at the Garrick and then at the Criterion Theatre, until the July heat closed the playhouses. There was a subsequent autumn season on the road. The piece has been frequently acted in stock, ever since that time, and on at least one occasion by amateurs (the Comedy Club of New York) and promises to continue to be so acted.

The original version of "Her Husband's Wife" is the one printed here.

The reader will of course discover in the quaint character of Irene the source of the play's chief charm. Just what we mean by style in a drama is not always easy to say—certainly less easy than when we are dealing with the printed essay or novel. It is a fusion of many elements, of which mere language is perhaps the least important, though it has its place. But when we are considering a farce, a play in which the sequence of comic incident, the merry tangling of plot, determines the type, we may declare that style is or is not present according to the measure of humanity imparted to the characters, the amount of interest awakened in the people who figure in the incidents, the wit, delicacy, sprightliness of their speech; as well, of course, as according to the