

I dropped in to the Chestnut Street Theatre on Thursday night, inspired by the announcement that Reginald DeKoven, composer of "The Mandarin," would conduct the orchestra that night. He did, and of course his friends were present and applauded his work. Without detracting from Mr. DeKoven's leadership, I will say that I would rather, and I think the chorus and orchestra would also, have Signor De Novellis as leader. That gentleman can get a more wonderful lot of refined work out of a chorus and orchestra, even when there is little material, than any maestro whom I have ever known in light opera. As for "The Mandarin" itself, it gave me an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with my dear old friends Pitti-Sing, Ko-Ko, Katisha, Nanki-Poo and the Mikado, masquerading as Chinese. Their new costumes, which must have seemed strange to them, were worn with "Middle Kingdom" dignity; they seemed to be to the manner born in all the jolly escapades, practical jokes and acquaintance with up-to-date topics, social, political and otherwise, which, we all know, are the property of the almond-eyed Orientals. The plot of Mr. Harry B. Smith's libretto is the old story of the double, and all the perplexities thereof. He credits the suggestion to one of the Latin comedies, but W. S. Gilbert had already used the scheme very effectively. It must be said that the mounting of the opera is worthy of all praise. There is gorgeous coloring, and a blazon of rich sunshine, and the glowing pictures of the Orient are rich and full of vitality. Unfortunately, Mr. Smith, as in all his librettos, has only written a story, and interspersed it with conversation and lyrics. He is inefficient in construction. There is no gradual development to a climax; the listener knows what the end will be, and there would be a feeling of monotony were the opera not brightened by interpolated jokes, which deal with matters that occur in all parts of the world, "from Indus to the pole."

The chorus is fresh voiced, the costumes are rich and tasteful in their imitative Chinese way, and the groupings and dances are all charming. Of the music it may be said that it resembles closely much of what the composer has written since he gave us "Robbin Hood." It is sometimes rather pretty, and there is a duet, "There Once Was a China Shepherdess," which is an unusually sweet and tender ballad. All of the music is refined and tasteful, but it lacks freshness and originality. There was a chorus in the first act that was very much like one in "L'Africaine," the composer of which, a man named Meyerbeer, Mr. De Koven recently announced had, in spite of his eccentricities, written some music which pleased him (Mr. De Koven). "The Silver Churn" song from "Patience" was made free use of, and there were other Sullivan operas which were recalled during the progress of the work. It is said of Moliere, the French dramatist, that when he was once accused of being a plagiarist, he simply replied that when he found a good thing of his own lying around, he appropriated it. Mr. De Koven, during his musical career, must have found a large number of his good things lying around loose. The work of George G. Boniface, Jr., as Fan Tan, the good-for-nothing workman, who is mistaken for the Mandarin, was far superior to that which he did in "The Magic Kiss," and that was excellent. His humor is spontaneous, his drollery is infectious and his drunken serenade in the first act is, as the showmen say, alone worth the price of admission. Miss Bertha Walzinger sings in a manner to delight music lovers, and her direct attack and pure and true intonation are such as are not often met with in singers of light opera.