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HURRICANE

Montreal, March 14.

Coming at a time when such drama as is being presented on our stage is either maudlin or trivial to the point of foolishness, Mme. Olga Petrova's new play, "Hurricane," is more than welcome—welcome that is, to those interested in the theatre as a social institution, and who see in it something more than a convenient medium for the exhibition of pulchritude and inanities.

The authoress has elected to describe it as a story of a life in four episodes. Emphatically, she does not preach. And here she is right. If the play conveys any particular significance to anybody, well and good; but preaching should be reserved for pulpits.

Mme. Petrova is content to let her characters do their own illumination. She takes a girl who has grown up amid the sordid surroundings of a Texas ranch-house, with a brutal, bigoted father and a mother worn to suffering by constant child-bearing and a cruel husband's despotic hand. The girl, Ilka, sees nothing before her but the sort of life her mother has led. Her soul revolts. She leaps at the first chance of freedom to win her way to the individual liberty she craves, through the only medium she can realize as assuring that liberty—money.

She runs away with a man who has offered her an opportunity to see life. His real character is revealed in the second act, which also shows us Ilka, having chosen the easiest way, shaking off the fetters of his despicable claims, striving to learn from a doctor who has become her sincere friend. He loves her, but she will not marry, because the life she is living puts marriage out of the question.

"Hurricane" is no play for those who are afraid of facing the cruel truths of life, who prefer to close their eyes to life's ugliness and try to convince themselves that there is no such thing as tragedy in the world. It is a play of vehement realism, essentially Slavic in its character, in its analysis of emotions, in its ruthlessness, its stripping of the mist from repulsive realities. Its philosophy is one of inevitable fatalism. There lies behind its fabric of struggle and storm a passionate sincerity, a fearlessness, a fidelity to an ideal, and such penetration of introspective analysis as makes it of compelling interest.

Mme. Petrova has handled her dialog with exceptional skill. It will endure cutting here and there, but in the main it is unusually pungent, arresting in significance, and devoid of unessentials. Its directness, its freedom from trivialities, its daring and its disconcerting simplicity hold attention.

This play is not without flaws. But it would be both futile and childish to criticize it on account of its subject when that subject is handled with such potency and such courage. Mme. Petrova set out to tell the story of a life in dramatic form upon the stage. She has succeeded in telling that story in a manner that grips her audience, holds its attention closely throughout—held it so until after 11:30, and even then brought her four curtains calls as a recognition and reward—and certainly provides ample food for interesting debate. She has done her work frankly, skillfully, without any unnecessary beating about the bush on one hand, without any false prudery, without any vulgarity, without any coarseness not inherent to a character, and absolutely without any pandering to unclean mentalities. This play may be terrible; so, often enough, is life. Of its essential truth there can be no doubt.

To the interpretation of the character of Ilka, Mme. Petrova brings all of her resources. And they are unusual. Her methods are subtle. She can convey as much by a shrug of the shoulder, the turn of her wrist, a glance, a swift tightening of the lips, as many other actresses by much more laborious and obvious means. She is at her best in the building up of a climax that bursts with torrential passion. You know it is coming, and yet, when it does come you are taken aback in spite of that knowledge.

The company includes some gifted artists. Dudmilla Toretzka who plays the broken mother with such intense realism, is a young woman with a brilliant future. Miss Forrest lends just the essential touch of pathetic interest to Masha—no more, no less—avoiding any tendency to sentimentality. Lewis Willoughby plays with a restraint that proves most effective in the scenes between him and Ilka, and lends verisimilitude to difficult moments of conflicting emotions. Judson Langill proves adequate in the slighter role of Richard Peterson. Robert Brister, though at times not quite natural enough, lends to that of the unspeakable Joe Jennings a realism in keeping with the revolting character. Patrick S. Barrett gives a powerfully drawn portrait of the grim, despotic father

in the first act, and H. H. McCollum brings to the presentation of the character of the doctor such natural methods and such sincerity as make that role one of the most effective in the play. Letha Walters must guard against indistinct delivery of her lines, as well as against prolongation of gestures and over-elaboration of emotional expression.

Staging, setting and mounting wholly adequate, unobtrusive, but meeting all atmospheric requirements throughout. "Hurricane" is of the strong meat of drama—no food for weaklings or fools.

Gardiner.