

Leading Man In "Ten Minute Alibi" Looks at Public's Love For Murder

THE following article was written for the "Radio Record" by George Thirlwell, the young English actor, who plays the part of the murderer in "Ten Minute Alibi," the mystery play which has already passed its 600th performance in London, and its 300th in Australia and New Zealand. In his story Mr. Thirlwell looks with a dispassionate eye on stage murder, and probes the reason for its undiminishing popularity.

the better—the public watches and reads the newspapers to see the elucidation of the crime. And what a tremendous argument goes on as to the guilt or amount of guilt, when the hand that caused all the trouble is finally exposed. I feel that we all love life far more than we suppose, and the thought that we may have it dashed away from us, unfairly, brutally, because of some dreadful jealousy, hate, or long-awaited revenge, is a situation which will always get the average man in the street to listen to what is being told about it.

As a man who is strangely unpassionate in anger in private life, I have found intense interest in playing Colin Derwent, who finds the perfect way to kill a particularly loathsome type of man in "Ten Minute Alibi." The play is a classic among crime plays, having scarcely any loophole or weakness. Some have said that the elder detective (so magnificently played by Frank Bradley) had a good idea that Derwent had done the crime and deliberately refused to notice the clock striking seven; this is, of course, absurd—the detective-inspector is quite true to life as are all the characters in the play, and is absolutely convinced that Derwent is innocent. Otherwise he would unquestionably have performed his duty and taken him round to Bow Street.

I notice that the critic in "The Dominion," Wellington, has said that I have not a very strenuous task. May I hasten to assure him that it is one of the most strenuous parts I have ever played, particularly as the character needs holding in check, right the way through? Any attempt at emotional breakdowns—or raising the scenes to "forte"—would be quite out of keeping with the young man's character. He is the type of young Englishman who went for his country's sake to the front in 1914 with the same grim determination of face it out as he determines to go through with this murder for the sake of a pure and lovely girl who has fallen into the clutches of a man who should not be permitted to continue to trap young women as he has already done in Act I of the play. It is not a question of "restraint," so much as a question of how this particular man would commit murder.

We, all of us in life, would behave in such a vastly different manner under like circumstances. But facial expressions can tell so much of what is going on—even to one's tummy dropping into one's boots—which latter piece of acting we are not able to show you, but no doubt when a few more experiments in electric lighting have been perfected, we shall be acting with a complete X-Ray outfit, so that our innermost thoughts and feelings can be laid bare.



George Thirlwell, as Colin Derwent, about to commit the murder round which the action of "Ten Minute Alibi" hinges.

SO many people have written to me and asked me over a "pot of small ale" (you see how useful Shakespeare is!) why it is that such tremendous interest is always taken in a murder play, and that, if it is a really good play, it will be bound to succeed, because of its rather gruesome theme?

One answer to that is, of course, that most people, even intellectual snobs of the theatre world, adore to be taken out of their daily lives and thrilled by any rather uncommon passion—and one can't very well commit murder without some sort of passion, even in these days of restraint. Another reason is that most men and women are always fearfully interested to see whether or not one gets away with it—as in "Payment Deferred" and other studies of a killing that became laid bare.

Since very early days public interest in death on the stage has been an accepted fact: and people who turn up their noses at a play, and treat it lightly, because it is about murder—simply do not know their "theatre." "Oedipus Rex," written 2000 B.C., and perhaps the greatest play of all time, had death in its most awful form as its central motif—to say nothing of the second theme of incest. "Hamlet," with the stage littered with suicides and murdered corpses, and so on until we come to "Ten Minute Alibi," the play of to-day that has been a sensation wherever it has been played.

I think man's eternal struggle for existence has added to the interest of murder. Whenever a person is done to death—and the more foul the method of killing