

The Crusade Against the London Music Halls

British Clergymen Warn Against Indecent Dances and Plays Which Bernard Shaw Defends



Another Suggestive London Music Hall Dance That Met Objection.

Bernard Shaw's Curious Plea for Tolerance

By Bernard Shaw

As a working playwright, I wish to ask the Bishop of Kensington a few questions concerning the criticism he has published of the music hall performance. So far he has begged the question he is dealing with—that is, he has assumed that there can be no possible difference among good citizens concerning them. He has used the word "suggestive" without any apparent sense of the fact that the common thoughtless use of it by vulgar people has made it intolerably offensive. And he uses the word "objectionable" as if it were a general agreement as to what is objectionable and what is not, in spite of the fact that the very entertainments to which he himself objected had proved highly attractive to large numbers of people whose taste is entitled to the same consideration as his own.

On the face of it, the Bishop of Kensington is demanding that the plays that he happens to like shall be tolerated and those which he happens not to like shall be banned. He is assuming that what he approves of is right, and what he disapproves of is wrong. Now, I have not seen the particular play which he so much dislikes; but suppose I go to see it to-night and write a letter to you to-morrow to say that I approve of it, what will the Bishop have to say?

He will have either to admit that his epithet of objectionable means simply disliked by the Bishop of Kensington, or he will have to declare boldly that he and I stand in the relation of God and the Devil. And, however his courtesy and his modesty may recoil from this extremity, when it is stated in plain English, I think he has got there without noticing it. At all events, he is clearly proceeding on the assumption that his conscience is more enlightened than that of the people who go to the Palace Theatre and enjoy what they see there. If the Bishop may shut up the Palace Theatre on this assumption, then the Nonconformist patrons of the Palace Theatre (and it has many of them) may shut up the Church of England by turning the assumption inside out. The sword of persecution always has two edges.

By "suggestive" the Bishop means suggestive of sexual emotion. Now, a Bishop who goes into a theatre and declares that the performances there must not suggest sexual emotion is in the position of a playwright going into a church and declaring that the services there must not suggest religious emotion. The suggestion, gratification and education of sexual emotion is one of the main uses and glories of the theatre. It shares that function with all the fine arts. The sculpture courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum in the Bishop's diocese are crowded with naked figures of such extraordinary beauty, re-

A VIGOROUS campaign to suppress what they consider indecent displays in the theatres and music halls is now being led by the Bishop of London, aided by the Bishop of Kensington and other prominent English clergymen.

The movement began with a protest to the Lord Chamberlain by the Bishop of Kensington against a dance at one of the larger London theatres. The Lord Chamberlain, who has control of all theatre licenses, threatened to withdraw this par-

ticular license unless the dance were modified.

Protests against other theatres followed, and immediately London became divided into rival camps, one claiming the fullest liberty for the stage, the other clamoring for a fuller censorship and restriction.

Great folk and little folk alike have taken part in the discussion. Among the former is George Bernard Shaw, the distinguished playwright and essayist, who has unlimbered his needle guns of satire and logic against the Bishops. His interesting explanation of his attitude is printed upon this page.



A Pose of the Famous English Dancers Oy-ra and Phyllis Monkman in "Keep Smiling," Objected to as Offensive in Its Intimacy.

And Below—The "Hello, Honey" Scene from the Same Entertainment, Which Was Declared "Indecent" by the Bishop of London.



The "X-Ray Ballet" at the London Alhambra, the Largest London Music Hall. This Parody of a Freakish Fashion Has Been Denounced by the Campaigners, Who Assert That the Display is Most Indecent.



The "Corsetiere Parade"—These Girls, Attired as Shown Here, Marched Through the Audience of One of the English Theatres at Each Performance. The Feature Was Strongly Objected to by the "Purity Campaigners" and Has Now Been Withdrawn.

finement and expression of the higher human qualities that our young people, contemplating them, will find baser objects of desire repulsive.

In the National Gallery body and soul are impartially catered for; men have worshipped Venuses and fallen in love with virgins. There it a voluptuous side to religious ecstasy, and a religious side to voluptuous ecstasy, the notion that one is less sacred than the other is the opportunity of the psychiatrist who seeks to discredit the saints by showing that the pas-

sion which exalted them was in its abuse capable also of degrading sinners.

Now let us turn to the results of cutting off young people—not to mention old ones—from voluptuous art. We have families who bring up their children in the belief that an undraped statue is an abomination; that a girl or a youth who looks at a picture by Paul Veronese is corrupted forever; that the theatre in which "Tristan and Isolde" or "Romeo and Juliet" is performed is the gate of hell, and that the contemplation of a figure attractively dressed or revealing more of its outline than a Chinaman's dress does is an act of the most profligate indecency. Of Chi-

nese sex morality I must not write in the pages of a newspaper.

Of the English and Scottish sex morality, that is produced by this starvation and blasphemous vilification of vital emotions, I will say only this: that it is so morbid and abominable, so hatefully obsessed by the things that tempt it, so merciless in its persecution of all the fine instincts which grow in the soil of our sex instincts when they are not deliberately perverted and poisoned, that if it could be imposed, as some people would impose it if they could, on the whole community, for a single generation, the Bishop, even at the risk of martyrdom, would reopen the



Palace Theatre with his episcopal benediction, and implore the lady to whose performances he now objects to return to the stage even at the sacrifice of the last rag of her clothing.

I venture to suggest that when the Bishop heard that there was an objectionable (to him) entertainment at the Palace Theatre the simple and natural course for him was not to have gone there. That is how sensible people act. And the result is that if a manager offers a widely objectionable entertainment to the public he very soon finds out his mistake and withdraws it.

It is my own custom as a playwright to make my plays "suggestive" of religious emotion. This makes them extremely objectionable to irreligious people. But they have the remedy in their own hands. They stay away. The Bishop will be glad to hear that there are not many of them, but it is a significant fact that they frequently express a wish that the censor would suppress religious plays that that he occasionally complies.

In short, the Bishop and his friends are not alone in proposing their own tastes and convictions at the measure of what is permissible in the theatre. But if such indi-

vidual and sectarian standards were tolerated we should have no plays at all, for there never yet was a play that did not offend somebody's taste.

I must remind the Bishop that if the taste for voluptuous entertainment is sometimes morbid, the taste for religious edification is open to precisely the same objection. If I had a neurotic daughter I would much rather risk taking her to the Palace Theatre than to a revival meeting. Nobody has yet counted the homes and characters wrecked by intemperance in religious emotion. When we begin to keep such statistics the chapel may find its attitude of moral superiority to the theatre, and even to the public house, hard to maintain, and may learn a little needed charity.

We all need to be reminded of the need for temperance and toleration in religious emotion and in political emotion, as well as in sexual emotion. But the Bishop must not conclude that I want to close up all places of worship; on the contrary, I preach in them. I do not even clamor for the suppression of political party meetings, though nothing more foolish and demoralizing exists in England to-day. I live and let live.

As long as I am not compelled to attend revival meetings or party meetings, or theatres at which the sexual emotions are ignored or reviled, I am prepared to tolerate them on reciprocal terms; for, though I am unable to conceive any good coming to any human being as a set-off to their hysteria, their rancorous bigotry, and their dullness and falsehood, I know that those who like the mere equally unable to conceive any good coming of the sort of assemblies I frequent; so I mind my own business and obey the old precept: "He that is unrighteous let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still; and he that is holy let him be made holy still."

For none of us can feel quite sure in which category the final judgment may place us; and, in the meantime, the music hall is as much entitled to the benefit of the doubt as the Bishop of Kensington.

John Armstrong Chaloner's Queer Sonnets

THE SLIT-SKIRT.

This fashion is a nasty, shameless trick,
'Tis nothing less—'tis simply scandalous!
'Twould make a pirate blush to th' very quick,
Or eke a Turk—'Tis Pechytermatous!
'Twould make the ghost of Nero yelp with fright!
And hie him to the shades of blackest Hell
And once got back, shout out—"I've seen a sight
That in this company I'm 'shamed to tell!"
The vilest days of dark Imperial Rome,
The most debauched epochs of the East
Kept naked women closely hid at home—
In the Slave-Quarter, or, to grace a feast.
'Twas left unto the present century
To bare female beauty to the passer-by!

THE DEVIL'S HORSESHOE.

"A fœdus sight for a philosopher—
Rich as Golconda's mine in lessons rare—
That gem-bedezen'd 'horse-shoe' at th' Opera,
Replete with costly hags and matrons fair!
His votaresses doth Mammon there array,
His Amazonian Phalanx dread to face!
To Mammon there do they their homage pay,

MR. JOHN ARMSTRONG CHALONER, once the husband of Amelle Rives, the novelist, and who escaped from Bloomingdale Insane Asylum in New York, where he was confined as a lunatic, has published a book of curious sociological and satirical sonnets from which the four printed below are selected.

Spang'ld with jewels, satins, silks and lace,
Crosses whose old bosoms in their corsets creak;
Beldams whose slightest glance would fright a horse;
Ghouls—when they speak one hears the grave-mole squeak—
Their escorts parvenus of feature coarse,
A rich array of Luxury and Vice!
But in spite of them, the music's very nice."

THE FEMALE FACE OF THE N. Y. "400."

Hard's a "pelter" is its physiognomy!
And just about as bad as "pelter"—some.
At this some critics may cry out, "Oh! my!
How can he, 'The 400,' so sore sum!"
To which I swift reply, "Not all my friend,
Are thus intended to be limned by me,

Tho' some—if truth be told must be so panned,
Altho' the penning grieves me grievously,
Purse-proud conceit, and coldness—heart's of flint,
Mean-birth—by fortune's wheel made sudden rich—
Are on their faces stamped by Nature's mint,
Whilst of charity show they less than witch!
The daughters of the poor do stand aghast
As o'er their doings their pure eyes are cast."

A PRUDE-TERMACANT.

As thy smug features, Madam, we do scan—
Tip-tilted nose and bony, horse-like jaw—
We say, "Nature surely meant her for a man—
Here catch we Nature in a fatal flaw."
But then think we: "No, Nature knoweth deep.
Her ways pass finding out in many things.
Such hags as these are built for husbands weak—
For whiffing, piffing, little mannikins."
Your husband's weak as water in a ditch—
Ask his opinion—he will say—"See May!"
So Nature made thee, Madam, near-male-witch
Who, "Hubby's" part in politics might play.
As spiteful and hard-hearted as you're rude
History says "Part termagant. Part prude."