

At the Theaters



Milder Elzine in 'The Count of Luxembourg' at the Brandeis

Saxe Connelly at the Orpheum

Robt Wayne Leading Man at the American

Irene Franklin at the Orpheum



Immit Francis in 'The Count of Luxembourg'



Slim (Eddie) Lemons at the Krug



Carrie Thatcher with the Boyd Theater Stock Company



Violet Pearl at the Gayety

A GENTLEMAN of ripened experience and discerning judgment, who is properly fitted to speak authoritatively on any topic wherein art in any of its manifestations may be concerned, has written to this department of The Bee a note which very fairly touches on one of the conditions at the theater against which the patron has no adequate defense. He writes under date of September 23, 1913, of the "Dr. DeLuxe" performance which has been given at the Brandeis on Monday evening:

"It is about time that the American audience at a theater should have the privilege of expressing its disapproval as well as approval of a performance. We are graciously permitted to applaud when we are pleased, but when we are displeased we are limited to silence, which cannot express the degree of disapproval many a performance merits. In continental Europe one is permitted to hiss a performance if it is rotten. I should suggest the practice of holding one's nose between the thumb and forefinger would convey to the management and to the actors that they are offending."

"This method of expressing disapproval would have the further advantage of not disturbing the performers by any undue noise. Take for instance, the barelegged chorus in last night's performance of 'Dr. DeLuxe.' I have never in any theater going experience seen anything rotter than these old hooligans attempting to represent chickens by the transparent disguise of talking in a falsetto voice with their disgusting dirty bare legs certainly deserved some mark of disapproval from those who paid \$1.50 a ticket to see them."

"Legs have their proper place in the support of a person, and with a chorus generally the strongest support they have, but in this case they did not even have the merit of drawing the attention from the ugly faces of the chorus. Such thickened legs are enough to make a vegetarian of anybody. Of course, some benevolent applauded even this chorus, if the intelligent auditor without any means of expressing his disgust. It would have been a relief to one's feelings to have been able to hold his nose as a sign of disgust with the performance and as an avenue of relief for one's indignation."

"Why should not Omaha inaugurate this practice and give this country a method for showing disapproval which may result in giving the audience something of merit?"

It is quite possible that a majority of the spectators felt as does the writer of the foregoing, so far as the exhibition referred to is concerned, and quite probably a good many of them would like to have some way to have expressed their disapproval of the scene. Holding one's nose as indicative of displeasure, suggesting the presence of an offensive thing, might reach through the managerial epidermis, and it might not exhibitions far more reprehensible in their nature than the one complained of have been persisted in until the might of the law has been invoked in order that decency should be observed. The situation is one that has gone beyond the possibility of cure by mild methods; something drastic is required. And just what it may be, and how it shall be applied, and by whom, is not easily to be determined upon. The discussion has not recently been begun, nor has it been confined in its progress to the few who habitually or professionally debate in print the affairs of the theater. Men and women who are interested in the natural growth of the nation have noted and decried upon the deterioration of public manners as shown upon the stage, and have sought with patience for a remedy, for something that would turn the public, on whose patronage the theater depends for its existence, back to the better things, or at least to those things that are not intrinsically evil, and with such little encouragement that so far every concrete effort to establish a theater at which art shall be the first consideration has proven a flat and dismal failure.

Lamentable as the conclusion is, one is almost forced to it—that will prosper at the theater simply because it is evil; that as soon as it is established that a play or a dance or a song is improper its popularity is assured, and its vogue and "prosperity" is in direct ratio to its

impropriety. Where does the responsibility for the condition rest? With the people themselves, primarily. They want it, they are willing to pay their money for it, and some one will be found who will furnish it to them for the price. This is not especially pleasant to contemplate, when one is dealing with what should be an agency for the dissemination of useful knowledge and for the advancement of culture and the general elevation of public taste and understanding in the matter of refinement. Yet it is true, coarseness has come to be a marketable commodity at the theater, and is purveyed because of the demand for it. To be sure, this tendency has its manifestations in other ways; for example, the "turkey trot" was the special dance of one of the toughest dance halls in San Francisco's notorious "Barbary Coast" district, and the "Texas tommy" was developed at another similar resort; through the medium of the stage they were brought to public notice, and now for several years the public authorities have been driven to extreme measures to banish these admittedly disreputable exhibitions from dancing places where the young and presumably innocent are met to indulge in what ought to be a harmless diversion. Moving pictures are rigidly censored, and any that deal with or seem to glorify crime are forbidden, because such exhibitions have a tendency to mislead the youthful spectator and put him into the way of doing wrong. But so far no effort has been put forward to censor the drama that, by reason of its palpable inversion of ethics, is capable of exceedingly greater potential harm, because of the greater force and directness with which it presents its arguments. An example of this sort of play is "Within the Law," now well into its second year in New York, and still drawing immense audiences. It was seen in Omaha last season. The direct argument in this play is that the heroine, who has been wrongfully punished for a crime of which another was guilty, is justified in whatever of reprisal in kind she may make upon society, so long as she keeps "within the law." In the end she is brought out of all her troubles as the wife of the son of the man who persecuted her, and received into the family as worthy of the place. The falsity of this pseudo-logic need not be argued, for it must be apparent to any, but the possibility of harm to flow from such exhibitions is beyond calculation.

The Bee has never faltered in its demand for a high standard for the theater, any more than it has ever even tentatively approved unworthiness in any other department of life. It realizes that the theater is not a hindergarden, that plays are supposed to deal with vital things, and that discussion must be direct to be forceful and that to continue patronage must be attracted. These points are elemental. So also is the proposition that what is merely vulgar, or what is inherently wrong, has no place upon the stage. That "the people want it" is not sufficient reason for its being presented. The people are not always the best qualified to judge on these points. It has been proven they will not only tolerate, but will enthusiastically pay to see exhibitions that are bad from every standpoint. Indecency has no standing when it comes to public exhibitions, at the theater or elsewhere. Clean plays will prosper, for they always have, where they have sufficient merit. But right here The Bee wants to go on record as being profoundly sceptical as to whether the holding of one's nose to indicate offense at a vulgar exhibition is the remedy indicated.

There is every indication of a brilliant carnival engagement at the Brandeis theater, beginning this evening, when Klaw & Erlanger will present for the first time in Omaha, "The Count of Luxembourg," a musical romance by Franz Lehár, composer of "The Merry Widow," which has been the reigning musical success of all Europe for nearly two years. The American libretto is by Glen MacDonough, staged by Herbert Greatman, with the girl and ensemble numbers conceived and directed by Julian Mitchell. The two acts of "The Count of Luxembourg" are laid in Paris and offer the picturesque contrasts of Bohemia and society in the first the life of the busy, precarious painter, poets and models of the Latin Quarter are shown. There is the swift transition to the wealth and fashion of the gay French capital, with

men of title and beautiful women superbly gowned and jeweled. With such fascinating backgrounds, the romance of the principal characters is seen to the continuous delicious strains provided by that wizard of melody, Franz Lehár. The story is of how two young hearts, oddly enough, come together. But there's witchery in the telling, and the wonderfully melodious accompaniment is said

(Continued on Page Eleven.)

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