

THEATERS & MUSIC

Revival of Life at Theater; War Kindles Drama Anew; Effect of Movies on Stage

Advantages and Limitations of Each in Presenting Plays and Providing Entertainment for People.

By T. W. McCULLOUGH.

WHATEVER may be said about the solid foundation of the stage, or its magnificent superstructure, decked with the trophies of art and literature, those who have to do with the daily administration of the theater are chiefly impressed with its uncertainties. Success at the theater depends on public favor, and experience has demonstrated this to be an elusive and not at all dependable factor. The public is fickle, changes its mind frequently, and is not at all to be depended upon in the matter of its tastes or whims. It will go into ecstasies over one thing, and will coldly pass by another exactly similar. It will pour out its laudation and its cash to the reward of one actor, and allow another of equal merit and capacity to go hungry, and no man can say why. Therefore, we find more gray hairs than big fortunes in the box offices. One problem is always before the manager—to find out what the public wants and furnish it before the mood changes.

Paradoxical as it may seem, with the coming of the war has come a revival at the theaters. At the outset, activities in the mimic world were checked. This may have been directly attributable to the war as a controlling cause, or it may be ascribed to the fact that in America a decline had already set in, and the "legitimate" was already in a parlous way. Folks had tired of the musical comedy, the risky French farces and the equally risqué but not always so obvious English problem play had palled on the public taste, the pornographic drama added its dead weight to the load already burdening the tottering structure, and the movies had put the "gaieties" entirely out of commission. Then, the big musical reviews and the burlesque shows had almost entirely eliminated the musical comedies, and only a few managers were bold enough to venture on the uncertain seas whose waters dashed more ominously day by day or, rather, night by night, around the front doors of the theaters that saved open, and from the outlying districts went back to New York such discouraging word as confirmed the managers there in their opinion that "business was bad." For the last two seasons cities such as Omaha have almost gone without good theatrical attractions. Just a few companies have struggled along, enough to keep the light from flickering out entirely, but not such as would warrant even the most optimistic of press agents calling the seasons brilliant.

While this was going on for the real stage, the moving picture industry was swelling like Jonah's gourd. It did not exactly grow up overnight, but if any man of enterprise could have foreseen five years ago what actually has happened and backed his judgment he would be able by this time to pay the war debt with his profits. Not even the automobile has shown such growth as has attended the development of the moving picture. It suddenly passed from the condition of a toy or a curiosity to that of an established feature of American life. Promoters took hold, but the business grew faster than anyone connected with it, and the men who had ventured their money in the enterprise found themselves in the strange position of having to struggle to keep up with the game they sought to push. The public wanted the "movies," and apparently still wants them. Every now and then some wisecracker rises up and utters himself of the prediction that the day of the moving picture is about over and that the people are getting tired of watching shadows, but the answer is always in the form of a new palace for the exhibition of those same shadows, and the rush to see them grows instead of diminishes.

Many reasons may be cited for the popularity of the moving pictures. Greatest among these is that of price. The "neighborhood" house gives its little entertainment for a nickel; downtown the price runs from a dime up to in some places half a dollar, but for the latter figure one gets comforts in proportion. For these prices one may have from half an hour to two hours of rational entertainment under conditions that are pleasant at worst, and in most houses nowadays are such as conduce to the highest enjoyment. In this way the moving picture exhibitors have looked after their public well. In the best houses, of which Omaha has some splendid representatives, music is afforded of excellent quality, often specially scored or particularly adapted for the film on exhibition, while the creature comforts of the patrons are carefully looked after and delicately catered to. Going to the movies, from this point of view, is no longer an adventure, but just a trip in search of comfort.

From the standpoint of art itself, much may be said for and against the "movie." Its greatest disadvantage is that it is but a shadow, that it must always be made in such way as will bring out the points, and this only can

be done by centering the lights on the main picture. Photography has done wonders, but it yet has its limitations, and the projecting machine is the camera's most inexorable critic. Against this may be set the capacity of the camera for presenting action, far beyond that possible to the stage, and for the preservation of the locale the visualization of scenes that must be omitted from the procession of the spoken drama, thus maintaining the continuity of the tale as well as emphasizing the lesson. And when the dramatic story, frequently of great power in itself, is enhanced by the wonderful stage settings the camera can furnish, the great world outdoors being at its call, and the actors are shown in surroundings that are natural, and with all the regular course of life flowing around them, the impression is immeasurably heightened and the advantage of the picture over the play itself is correspondingly increased. This is well shown in such plays as "The Barrier," "The Tale of Two Cities" and a long list of fine dramas that have been made over into films, and in this sense greatly improved. For the production of comedies and slapstick farces the camera is far ahead of the stage. Thousands have laughed at the witty or humorous sayings of a favorite comedian on the stage, but millions have roared over the antics of his prototype on the screen.

Yet the picture lacks the essential spark of life that would make it whole. It is the shadow, and not the substance. People watch it flicker across the screen, and go away, rested, perhaps, but with no more emotion stirred, no line of argument established, and no mental effort quickened to the consideration of the solution of a problem. The moving picture in this regard is a sedative rather than a stimulant. It lacks the great impulse that comes with the combination of the spoken word and the animated gesture, and "sub-titles," as they ever so cleverly worded, can not supply this omission. For illustration, the spectator can sit and watch the terrible outburst of wrath with which David Maldonado turns Iris Bellamy out of doors and wrecks the furniture in the flat, but who can understand the pathos of the plea poor Iris makes in her effort to explain and justify the course which she took and which had wrecked her life? What conception can the spectator gain from watching the picture of the progress of calamity that grows inexorably until it overwhelmed her, or of the perplexities of Paula Tanqueray, her yearning for just a bit of the sympathy that was denied her? This comparison might be extended indefinitely. Certain things are not for the camera, and real drama is one of them. Great spectacles, rough and tumble farces, "serial" stories, and the like belong to its realm, but the real art of the theater must remain forever the possession of those who have the genius and the soul to interpret its message and drive it home to the multitude.

This discussion has wandered slightly from the original purpose. It was intended to call attention to the fact that the theater in America is undergoing a general revival this season, for whatever reason does not particularly matter. Those who are engaged in attending to its legitimate business have plenty to do in that line, while the rest of the world is

Bayard Veiller Boosts Melodrama; He Writes 'Em and Ought to Know

As a national barometer there is nothing so infallible as the theater in the opinion of Bayard Veiller, author of "The Thirtieth Chair." It is Mr. Veiller's idea that one need only look into the theaters of a nation to be able to form a pretty accurate estimate of the people of the country themselves. "Prior to the beginning of the war abroad," said Mr. Veiller, in discussing his theory, "there was no nation on the globe so fond of amusement in its lighter form than France. And one has only to run over in his mind the plays that have come to us from the French during the past generation to see how completely that lightness and frivolity of thought in the people themselves was shown in their plays. "Here in America we are essentially now and have been since the first inception of our country a people of action. And our stage has been a mirror in which that action has been reflected a all times. "It has always seemed to me that there is nothing so melodramatic in the entire history of the world as America. Its growth from infancy to a position of equality with the oldest and most powerful nations on earth almost within the span of man's memory beats any novel I ever read. "And nothing better than our own stage tells this melodramatic story of our country. Go back over the history of our theater and you will find that it has almost invariably been the plays of American blood and bone that have struck loudest and truest the popular note of our theater-goers. "Melodrama implies action. Its spirit is that of do or die; of never giving up. The melodramatic hero, no matter how deep the plot of the villain, never gives up. He grasps at the



rejoiced to see the signs of renewed life and is not concerned beyond the fact that good things have come and more are coming for Omaha. Last spring announcement was made that one of Omaha's best theaters was to be torn down to make room for a business block. This has been reversed and the Boyd is entertaining many people nightly and will continue for a long time to come. The Brandeis is showing a tendency to prosperity it has not enjoyed for a couple of seasons, while the Orpheum, the Empress and Gayety are having such patronage as must impress the owners with the thought that they are on the right track. The Strand, the Sun and the Muse naturally show the way for the exclusive moving picture theaters, and daily and nightly their beautiful auditoriums are packed to capacity, while all over the city the smaller houses are doing such business as compensates the owners for lean days gone, but not yet entirely forgotten. Two more big moving picture palaces are projected, work on one of them being actively underway, and the end is not. Business is good at the theaters, thank you.

For the Ak-Sar-Ben season special arrangements have been made to care for visitors from out of town. Good attractions are offered at all the houses this week.

Film World Widens Fast; Omaha Houses Up to Best; Review of the Local Field

Enterprising Managers Make Many Friends by Watching Interest of Public and Meeting Demands.

By HARRY B. WATTS.

THE motion picture industry is gaining headway in Omaha by leaps and bounds. Announcement of two picture palaces being built by the people interested in the Strand and Sun theaters, at Fifteenth and Douglas, has made quite a number of folks sit up and take notice while those who predicted but a short life for the "movies" have nothing to say. These theaters will each have a seating capacity of approximately 2,500 people, representing a large investment of money; will be equipped with the best that money can buy and will have the latest conveniences in general which has so far devised for the public.

It was only a matter of some two years ago when there was only one or two theaters presenting motion pictures that we could point to with pride, and this condition had existed for quite some time. Then came along Mr. A. H. Blank and leased the old American theater, changing the name to the Strand, and obtaining for manager Mr. H. M. Thomas, who had handled practically every kind of a show known. It was their belief that Omaha would appreciate a really high-class motion picture theater, and

although this theater had remained dark and been called a failure, it was a success from the start under the new control, and no doubt will continue to be. The theater was thoroughly overhauled, the latest equipment installed and the stage used for special settings, according to the kind of a picture being shown, which added an atmosphere not otherwise attainable.

When it was thought already there were too many motion picture theaters, S. H. and Harry Goldberg, associated with W. R. McFarland, W. H. Jones and Harry Rachman, announced they would erect a theater on the site of the old World-Herald building. The theater is a credit to the industry and has one of the prettiest lobbies in the city. A large orchestral pipe organ furnishes the music.

The Empress theater, so 'tis said, plays to more people in a day than any other two theaters in the city. The policy here is four acts of high-class vaudeville and the latest and best feature, topical and comedy subjects. Managers Le Marquand and Ledoux have certainly hit the trend of public opinion, while the theater itself is a work of art.

It might be thought that all these new and large theaters in the business section would materially damage the houses that were formerly practically without competition, but not so. Possibly the best example of this is the Hipp, which still enjoys practically the same splendid patronage as before the present condition. (Continued on Page Three—Column Four)

Hula Hula Girls Who Had 'Em All Going at the Den



Walter Thrane, Herman Reinholtz, A. E. McEzarnar, L. P. Campbell, E. M. Finkenstein.

Music Need of the People; Teachers Must Do Share; Art Calls for Great Effort

Pupils Should Select With Care Instructors and Devote Much Time to Hard Practice.

By HENRIETTA M. REES.

IN THESE days when everything of importance in our lives is pushed more or less to the back in favor of what is most important for our country boys at the front, for our allies, and to help to win the great world war, and conservation is practised in all things, it behooves those of us who are musically patriotic, and also patriotically musical, to think what best we can do for conservation in music. Those not interested to any great extent might be heard to say, that one way to conserve musically would be to leave music out of the great general scheme altogether; this would not be conservation at all, but complete waste of one of the greatest arts which the world has succeeded in building up with centuries of efforts. During times of war, the arts are the first to suffer, and it rests largely with those in whose care they are trusted, for this generation, just how much or how little survives for the next. Nor is it just a question of quantity, but rather of quality.

It is only the best which survives at any time, and during war times it is a case of how much of the best is able to survive. Therefore it is part of the means of conservation in music, for each and everyone who is interested to conserve the very best that there is in his connection with the art. If he is only a listener, he can save a great deal of the time he spends listening, by choosing carefully what he listens to, choosing always the best of the kind he is interested in, not wasting his time on barren sounds. Then by his attention gaining the greatest pleasure and profit from the music he hears. One does not necessarily have to have the latest song, if what he chooses wears well with frequent repetitions. If he is a professional recitalist, it is more than ever up to him to do his best, and to make his best worthy, and fine enough to save the love of music for the people, and to help them to realize the place there is for music in their lives.

But perhaps with the pupils and teachers the greatest chance for conservation in music is given. The pupils of today are the musicians of tomorrow, and a great responsibility rests with those whom their education is entrusted. The great exodus of pupils every year to Europe for their training is a thing of the past; it is the day of the teachers in America and it is up to these teachers to make good. Many of them have already done so, and have established reputations for themselves by results which nobly testify to their worth. There are many well equipped and competent teachers to be found all through our broad land, and Omaha has its share of them. The teacher should view his responsibility more seriously than ever. He should be assisted in his own mind that he is himself broadly enough educated and fitted for his high purpose. Otherwise his efforts are not for saving music, but rather for injuring the cause. He should use the greatest care in his selection of teaching material and in his manner of teaching, in order to impart his knowledge to

his pupils most efficiently. He should save time and effort by constant strictness, for even though pupils may hate him for making them conquer difficulties they will love him and thank him with corresponding intensity afterward for making them do it. During war times the teachers must produce the greatest results, for not only their livelihood, but the musical life of the community rests in the balance.

Lastly, there is the part the pupils may play in this conservation. Many of them can eliminate the waste of time they spend watching the clock. In the September issue of the Musicians there is an excellent article on "Efficiency in Practice" by Wilbur Follett Unger, who prescribes a certain number of repetitions of each part of the lesson and demands that the pupil keep a record of how many times he has gone over the work each day, thus eliminating the idea of practicing by the hour. Then there are the short cuts of slow practice and constant accuracy. These are the only short cuts there are, backed by thought and persistency. A pupil should realize his valuable opportunity in being privileged to study this wonderful art and should approach it and continue it with all the humility of spirit, courage and enthusiasm of his nature. He should learn to concentrate. Concentration is the secret of musical progress. Concentration upon the lesson when it is given, upon the manner of practicing and upon what is practiced, concentration of thought, time and effort in connection with all musical endeavor is the only key to success. Conservation in music by eliminating much that is a waste in all branches of it may prove in the long run to be the conservation of music and concentration is conservation. By the way, gentle reader, can you concentrate?

We actually sat up and took notice the other day when we heard Mrs. Peter Jensen of Council Bluffs play several numbers on the violin. Mrs. Jensen is a comparative newcomer to these parts. Before her marriage to Mr. Jensen she was Miss Mabel Woodworth of Chicago, where she was a member of the faculty of the American Conservatory of Music, one of the best known music schools there. Mrs. Jensen has a broad, full tone, which is a constant delight, and she plays with a musical grace and assurance which should win her many engagements in Omaha, once she becomes known in musical circles.

The Musical Courier suggests the following in order to correct the abuses to the musician of the charity concerts:

"Musicians who are public performers should form local unions in every city and town and elect a committee to regulate charity concerts. This committee should include also as members one or two business men appointed by the mayor. A responsible person should be named to handle the finances. Before her marriage to Mr. Jensen she was Miss Mabel Woodworth of Chicago, where she was a member of the faculty of the American Conservatory of Music, one of the best known music schools there. Mrs. Jensen has a broad, full tone, which is a constant delight, and she plays with a musical grace and assurance which should win her many engagements in Omaha, once she becomes known in musical circles.

"If this is done the matter of donating his or her services may be left to the individual musician. At any rate, if such musicians themselves choose to be generous (or foolish) they will at least know that they are not being cheated."

Noted Teachers Offer Services to Students Who Will Come to Omaha

Omaha has long been recognized as an important center for the study of music, and its many competent and brilliant teachers have attracted hither large numbers of earnest students.

The present season is more than ever of importance in this regard, for the study abroad is cut off entirely now, and all work must be done at home. Omaha's galaxy of high-grade instructors has been increased correspondingly, and opportunity is offered here to gain musical knowledge and experience such as never was offered before.

Sherwood Music School. Omaha is to have an accredited branch of the Sherwood Music school of Chicago under the direction of several Omaha teachers. During the last fortnight Mr. Schurgen, registrar of the Chicago institution, has been in the city making arrangements for this acquisition to the cultural facilities of the city and is now making formal announcement of the organization of the Omaha branch. The Sherwood Music school of Chicago was founded twenty-two years ago by William H. Sherwood, "America's greatest pianist," and is said to have graduated more successful pianists and teachers than any other music school.

Several years ago this school established an extension department to "extend" the opportunity for metropolitan conservatory training to music students who find it inconvenient to leave home to obtain it. The regular conservatory course has been put into printed form, which, when studied under the affiliated teachers in the various branches of the extension department, leads to the teachers' certificate and diploma. This plan standardizes music teaching and solves the (Continued on Page Two—Column Three)