

AT THE THEATRES.

It has been a rather dull week, the University of Michigan glee and banjo club and Effie Ellsler at the Lansing, and the Spooners at the Funke, making up the sum of the week's attractions. The season is practically over. Both houses have some scattering attractions left, but they will come few and far between.

The Spooners opened their week at the Funke Monday night to an audience that overflowed the seating capacity of the house. They have given entertainments nightly since, and tonight they will close their engagement with one of their favorite comedies. There will also be a matinee this afternoon when "Little Lord Fauntleroy" will be presented. The Spooners have played in Lincoln so often and are so generally known that a criticism of them is trite, and besides one does not feel like criticising on organization that plays for "10, 20 and 30." All through the west these people have a clientele peculiarly their own, and in this city, as elsewhere, the audience that attends their performances is invariably pleased. This week a good many people have gone two or three times. The Spooners are entirely frank and honest. They do not claim merit that they do not possess. They know their field and their limitations and make no attempt to get over the bars. They lay no traps to ensnare a dollar audience into witnessing a thirty cent play. Their honesty disarms criticism. If harrowing villainy and broad comedy and tear-starting pathos as rendered by the Spooners gives pleasure to John who occupies a seat in the parquet near the stage, or to William and Mary in the more fashionable dress circle, or to Tom and Joe and Bill in the gallery, what occasion is there to point out weaknesses for the benefit of other people who don't go to the "show?" If paroxysms of delight follow Miss Cecil Spooner's appearance in her dance specialty, far be it from the cold critic to criticise that which, manifestly, gives so much genuine pleasure to those who pay money to attend the performance. It is a fact that the Spooners give a better performance than any popular price company that comes to Lincoln. They strive earnestly and faithfully, and they are solidly established in their special field.

Possibly it was because they were approaching the end of their tour, or perhaps it was something else. At any rate, the concert given by the young men of the University of Michigan glee and banjo clubs at the Lansing theatre Tuesday evening was something of a disappointment. It was not as good as the entertainment given by the Princeton glee club earlier in the season, and it was inferior to the Ann Arbor boys' concert of a year or so ago. The boys, both in their performances on the stage and in their meanderings in the auditorium, gave the impression that they felt they were out on a lark. When not on the stage they were very much in evidence in the audience, and a number of the young men appeared to be on very good terms with several of our most charming young women. The patronesses occupied seats together in the first row of the dress circle. There were Mrs. J. H. Canfield, Mrs. C. H. Morrill, Mrs. L. C. Richards, Mrs. P. V. M. Raymond, Mrs. D. A. Campbell, Mrs. R. H. Oakley, Mrs. H. H. Wilson, Mrs. C. H. Gere, Mrs. J. A. Buckstaff, Mrs. F. M. Hall, Mrs. S. H. Burnham, Mrs. John B. Wright. The audience was small but enthusiastic. Carl Mauer, who is a decidedly clever dialect comedian, sang several songs that were well received. Mr. Thompson who also sang solos is a better actor than singer; the glees were of the usual stamp. The finale was an effective song, to a familiar and inspiring air, beginning—

Ann Arbor, 'tis of the we sing,
From thee our choicest blessings spring.

The banjo club composed largely of freshmen, showed evidence of careful training; the instrumental music was received just as cordially as the singing.

Miss Ellsler who is a favorite in some cities, is regarded with coldness in Lincoln. Her appearance at either of the local theatres always brings a frost. At the Lansing Wednesday evening, when she presented "Doris," she had her usual luck; but Miss Ellsler is not easily discouraged. She says she will keep on coming to Lincoln and will yet make our people get down at her feet. May she live long enough to achieve her object! "Doris," which has been seen here before, is not without merit. But it makes the men and

women who portray it appear ridiculous by compelling them to exaggerate. It has some effective scenes; but they are mainly purloined from other plays. It is constructed on conventional lines, and recalls the old time drama that used to flourish before the melodrama, with its increased excitement, crowded it out. There is the customary poison and pistols and daggers and anonymous letters. There is the same young girl who is cruelly wronged, the same bleary eyed villain and the same manly protector, that we have been seeing for lo! these many years. And there is the same tremulous slow music in the pathetic scenes. Mr. Drouet might rewrite "Doris," leaving out some of the commonplace, and make a fairly strong play out of it. Miss Ellsler, as *Doris*, lacks some of the buoyancy of youth, but she is graceful, and in the third act she does some very clever acting. Mr. Drouet, the author, is a bit more reserved than most of the other performers. His *Kenneth Ashleigh* is well done. Frank Weston is a capable actor, and were it not for the fact that he is at times forced to overdo his part his *Brian O'Neil* would be a strong characterization. Such scenes as that in which *Mr. Beetle*, *Mr. Chamberlin*, at the head of a committee of parishioners demanding an explanation from *Doris*, burlesques a role that ought to be serious, detract much from the play.

Frank Daniels, when in the enjoyment of the hey-day of "Little Puck's" popularity a few years ago wrote an article for THE COURIER on the tendency of the stage. He maintained that farce comedy was then at its height, that it would soon begin to decline, that in four or five years it would be relegated to its proper place—in the rear. That Mr. Daniels believed what he said to be true may be inferred by his throwing over of farce comedy for light opera, and he appears to have been quite as successful, by the way, in Williard Spenser's "Princess Bonnie", as in the Anstey farce. The Lincoln theatres have given the public a fairly representative list of attractions during the season now drawing to a close, and a review from the local post of observation would seem to indicate that Frank Daniels' premises were not badly taken. Farce comedy is not entirely out of vogue, but it has visibly subsided. It is no longer the dominant element in theatrical production. "Natural Gas" has ceased to flow, and the skit with which Donnelly & Giffard have attempted to renew their former success is, comparatively speaking, a failure. "Little Puck" has been permanently withdrawn. Hoyt is still writing plays, but beginning with "The Midnight Bell" there has been a noticeable diminution of the noisy or farcical element. "A Texas Steer" contains little of the rattley-bang of "A Tin Soldier" and "A Brass Monkey," and "A Temperance Town" and "The Milk White Flag" partake largely of dramatic form. The farces that have succeeded in the last year or two have, in many instances, depended largely on vaudeville features. The latest form of farce comedy is not at all like the farce comedies of Hoyt's earlier days. It is the old time variety show rejuvenated.

Since Mr. Daniels wrote the tendency of the stage has veered from a direct course toward the farce, and latterly has tacked in different directions. At times the sporting comedy has threatened to overwhelm us, and the fling and jingle of vaudeville have been abroad in the land. There has also been a considerable leaning toward melodrama. Very recently, in New York, the stage has manifested an alarmingly general tendency to the *risque*, and living pictures and nudity have been profitable while the legitimate has been temporarily obscured. This latest bent in theatricals was discussed at some length by William H. Crane the other day.

"There never was a time when immorality was flaunted in so glaring a manner from the stage; never was a time when vice was made to appear so attractive," says Mr. Crane. "Plays have been presented that dealt with the social evil in a most barefaced and open manner. Persons were shown who had no more regard for the seventh commandment than they had for some unknown quantity, and children have sat in orchestra seats and listened to things that have almost staggered their elders. What is worse, it is reasonable to suppose that the children dwelt on these very things and allowed them to take root in their young minds. At one time last season, in not less than six theatres, all of them in Broadway, plays were being presented that had dissolute, immoral characters. The unfortunate thing about it is that vice in almost any form is attractive. There is no getting away from this. I don't doubt that if the announce-