Evening Ledger

AMUSEMENT SECTION

Address all communications to Dramatic Editor Evening Ledger, Independence Square, Philadelphia.

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PHILADELPHIA, SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 1916

Opera Houses for All!

IT LOOKS very much as if Philadelphia was to be embarrassed with more riches in the opera house line. We have the Metropolitan—occupied almost once a week by the art it was built for. We have the Academy of Music—housing amateur opera every now and then, stray lectures and recitals and the weekly concerts of the Orchestra. And now that Hammerstein appears to have made enough money from his cigar-rolling machinery to venture a new tilt with art and the courts, we may expect a third great operatic building farther down Broad street.

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Waste, Waste, Waste

Now there are a good many angles to this situation which aren't so pleasing as the prospect of more good opera. It is absurdly evident that building three huge theatres suitable only for musical entertainment is a grave economic waste, when all the musical events of a single season could be housed in one. It is also more than likely that, though Hammerstein's competition may be useful in driving the Metropolitan to give us better casts and newer operas, he will discover that Philadelphia cannot or will not support a solid season of grand opera at grand prices. Then some one will have to buy him out. Next vaudeville—movies—and the rest is silent.

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Why Pamper Grand Opera?

But all that isn't half so alarming as the evidence Mr. Hammerstein once again supplies of the absurd notion that the bastard art of grand opera is so sacrosanct as to warrant endowment, while the far greater, far more democratic art of drama goes on its poverty-stricken, hand-to-mouth way. Possibly grand opera couldn't exist without millions behind it, though it might go a good way toward solving the problem by the simple expedient of paying its artists something near decent, normal salaries. It is the misfortune of the drama that it can struggle along in a sort of a way on the every-day patronage of the people. And of course it has to struggle.

The requirements of the present day commercial theatre degrade its art and put up a barrier of two-dollar prices against both the appreciative and the unappreciative multitude which made the Greek drama and the Elizabethan drama what it was. Nobody thinks of endowing a popular theatre to give the average person good, entertaining plays at decent prices. And nobody thinks of putting up a temple of high-priced, high-brow drama, given on a scale corresponding to the opera. The Hammersteins fly to the fleshpots of the lyric stage.

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A "Social Event" for the "T. B. M."

But why not build a Hammersteinian house for the drama? Every element could be supplied that makes opera-giving popular. Its prices could be set at the exclusive five-dollar mark. Its actors could be paid as fabulous salaries as Caruso and Farrar. Its scenery could be quite as badly painted. Its auditorium could be made quite as preposterously large. It is even possible that its audience could be gathered by the same bait of the "social event." Surely, surely, matrons might admire their friends' costumes as thoroughly, while it is even probable that the husbands would find their forced relaxation after the day's work not half so boring.

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Missing a Good Failure

Such solemn thoughts are appropriate to this season—the dullest in years. They are more than appropriate to this particular week in this particular season. Baltimore, just around the corner, has been witnessing John Galsworthy's finest drama, "Justice," which Walter Prichard Eaton describes on another page. Boston—with some six or seven first-class houses to Philadelphia's five—will find plenty of room for "Justice" in a week or two. In general, now that Philadelphia's theatres have been reduced in number, our city seems to be enjoying too much prosperity. There are too many long runs and no gaps for novelties outside the accepted Broadway successes of last season. Boston sees "try-outs" of new plays for Hodge and Tellegen, and a first production by Frohman and Belasco—more than a dozen such novelties, in fact, to Philadelphia's two or three.

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Forward, Money Bags!

Mr. Eaton thinks "Justice," with its stark realism, may be doomed to failure on Broadway. Another inducement to Mr. Hammerstein and his love for money-losing!

K. M.

Enter a Leading Man

With the opening for the week at the Knickerbocker Theatre tomorrow The Players will introduce a new leading man in the person of John Warner, late of the Rochester stock company.

Mr. Warner was born in Boston and he has been on the stage virtually since his childhood days. He has been a member of stock organizations in his native city, Richmond, New York and Rochester and has also scored success on the road in "Stop Thief" and a number of successful productions by Frohman, Cohan & Harris, Klaw & Erlanger and others.

Drama League to Meet

A meeting of the league will be held at the Broad Street Theatre, Broad street below Locust street, on Thursday afternoon, March 16, at 2:30 o'clock. Admission by membership card or by reserved seat ticket. The program promises a most entertaining meeting. The league draws attention to the following features:

1. The Jayne prize play: "The Bravest Thing in the World." It seems to us an almost perfect children's play. Come and judge it. And why not bring one or more children to help you enjoy it?
2. A very amusing lantern exhibit of drawings and comment by Mr. Mearns on the woes and humors of a Play-Going Committee. You'll enjoy this.
3. The chairman of the Prize Play Committee will tell how easy it is to choose a perfect children's play. If we can get him to say what he really thinks, there ought to be some fun in that, too.

HENRY C. SHEPPARD
One of the most valued players of the Stage Society at the Little Theatre.

LETTERS

Alas, Those Censors

To the Photoplay Editor.

Sir—If you should see fit to publish this in your Saturday column, I should be very much pleased. I read with interest your arraignment of the Pennsylvania Board of Useless Censors and you stated the case very clearly. These parasites preying upon a great industry must be certainly quaking for the jobs they strive so valiantly to derend. They actually have the audacity to apply for an extension of the power so foolishly bestowed and to pose as a friend of the industry and public. They seem in their ignorance to believe that their petty prejudices are to be reverenced as if they came from a truly wise body endowed with insight into life, miraculous intelligence, and vast experience and not from such a short-sighted, narrow-minded collection of ill-assorted fanatics as Breitinger et al. have shown themselves to be. They can not be impartial, or they would lose their ill-gotten gains. It was nothing short of madness to give such fanatics power. In their astounding report they complacently affirm that but for their ever-ready shears pictures would be failures and morals shattered.

J. C. JOHNSTON.
Philadelphia, March 5, 1916.

The Unpatriotic American

To the Photoplay Editor:

Sir—As I am a daily reader of your paper, I wish to ask you to publish these few words and wake the people of Philadelphia up.

I attended this evening's performance at the Lafayette Photoplay's Theatre, 2914 Kensington avenue, to see "The Battle Cry of Peace," and while there they played all of our favorite American pieces, and not one, except my boy and I, had backbone enough to stand up while they were being played. Is it not proper in Kensington, as wherever I go in town to a show, they seem to respect the American songs. It seemed to me that the people looked at each other, and still sat in their seats; not one of them wanted to start. Are they ashamed, or what is it? What do they intend to do for their country? If they intend to wait until the other one starts, let them stand up for their rights and not wait until they are told to stand up.

I am very sorry to think we have a few thoughtless people in this world.

MRS. C. JACKSON.
Philadelphia, March 7, 1916.

For Movie Writers' Club

To the Photoplay Editor:

Would you please favor me by helping me to form a club of photoplaywrights in this city? A little notice in your daily column, I think, would bring the desired result.

WILLIAM YOCUM,
2437 W. Allegheny ave.
Philadelphia, March 6, 1916.

Elmendorf in Italy

Next Friday evening and Saturday afternoon "Northern Italy" will be the theme of Elmendorf's illustrative discourse. This journey, which will extend from the top of the Simplon Pass to the Eternal City, will embrace the attractive features of the far-famed Italian lakes.

EQUALITY

Close-up

Katherine Franek

Miss Franek was born at West Palm Beach, Florida, December 25, 1888, and is the daughter of Abraham and Sarah Franek, her mother's maiden name being Hirshen. Abraham Franek was born at Kiev, Russia, his ancestors, as far back as he can trace his lineage, being of French origin. Miss Franek's mother came from Odessa, Russia, and is of purely Russian ancestry.

Miss Franek received her education at the De Land Seminary, in De Land, Fla., where she studied until she was 16. During her school days she was the most enthusiastic member of school theatrical clubs, and was not only prominent in class plays, but enlivened society entertainments with a clever singing and dancing specialty, of which she was the originator.

Miss Franek's brother was in the managerial end of the theatrical profession, and during one of her summer vacations she decided she would become an actress. Her parents objected, and her brother talked against it, but she was obstinate, and finally, more to get rid of her continual pestering, her brother gained the consent of her father and mother for her to go on the stage, and secured for her a part in the original cast of "The Flaming Arrow," one of the most popular melodramas of that period. She stayed with this organization for three seasons, but the novelty of continued travel wore off, and, while still enamored of the stage, concluded she would rather have some place she could call home. This was during the time when the illustrated song was just becoming a popular number on vaudeville and motion-picture programs. She determined to follow this vogue, securing a position as a songstress in one of the most popular and up-to-date photoplay theatres in Philadelphia.

Motion pictures appealed to Miss Franek and, watching them daily, it was but natural, with her inclination for stage work, she should apply to the producing firm most convenient for a position as a screen actress. Her "I will" again stood her in good stead, as walking into the office of a prominent director she demanded work, and so impressed him with her determined air she was given a trial. Her career as a screen artist now fairly started, and, the work congenial, she forged rapidly ahead.

In October, 1914, she joined the Vitagraph Company as a stock member, and in this organization, where there was more opportunity for advancement, continued her climb up the ladder to motion-picture stardom. She is fully determined to become a recognized film star, and is continually studying to fit herself so that she may gain this distinction. The most important pictures in which she has appeared under the Vitagraph banner include distinct characterizations in such special features as "The Dawn of Understanding," "The Making Over of Geoffrey Manning," "Heredity."

WHEN TREE SO FORGOT HIS SHAKESPEARE AS TO HIT GROSSMITH

Lawrence Grossmith, the comedian now playing the principal role in "Nobody Home," which comes to the Adelphi March 20th, was once a Shakespearean actor in support of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. In the same company with him was Gerald du Maurier, son of the author of "Trilby," and, at present, one of London's leading actor-managers.

Mr. Grossmith tells this amusing story concerning his association with these two famous players.

"It was in the days long before Tree was knighted," said Mr. Grossmith, reminiscently. "I had just gone on the stage, and in the same company with me was Gerald du Maurier, who was a great pal of mine. We were both youngsters ready for a lark at any time, and Tree had us in the company with him largely because of the family influences. Tree was playing repertoire on the road, and whenever "Julius Caesar" was the bill, it was necessary for both du Maurier and I to play the roles of citizens in the mob scene. My special duty was to climb up a pillar, while my pal at Tree in his speech to the mob. Meanwhile du Maurier was down stage leading the citizens.

"One night du Maurier and I decided to change lines and places. He ascended the pillar, while I took his place as leader of the mob down stage. Tree knew nothing of this. When the time came for the interruption, du Maurier, tall and thin, suddenly emerged from behind the pillar, made up exactly as the late Sir Henry Irving. He had a wig of long wiglie hair, and, pointing his finger toward Tree, he delivered the lines of his part in the thin, trembling, nasoous voice of Irving giving a perfect imitation of that celebrated actor.

"Tree paused in amazement, stopped the performance and went up in his lines, while the audience laughed. In a few minutes Tree descended from the rostrum and walked over to where he saw me. He had in his hand the long roll of parchment, which served as a prop for Caesar's will. It was a roll of cloth fastened to two sticks of wood. When he came to the line, 'And here is Caesar's will?' he opened wide his arms, swinging the left arm with the will, so that this weapon struck me full upon the forehead. I staggered backward as though he had blinded me, and made my way off the stage as though it were part of the mob scene. Hastily rushing to the dressing room, I secured a large piece of putty, of the kind that actors use to build up their noses, and plastered this over my eye, so that it looked like a great welt. Then I went back of the stage, pushed my way through the mob, and took a position near Mr. Tree. When he turned and saw my discolored face and the great welt, he went up in his lines again.

"After the act, both du Maurier and I, laughing at the joke, were discussing in our dressing room what had happened. We both expected to be fired, and we were tickled to death because in our youthful enthusiasm we had upset the dignity of such a serious actor. Soon a messenger came, asking us to visit Mr. Tree in his dressing room. Du Maurier went in first, and through the open door I could hear what Tree said.

"'A very good imitation of Sir Irving,' began Tree, 'but hardly the time or the place, my boy. After all, you must remember—Shakespeare, you know—Shakespeare. That is all, but if you must imitate some one hereafter, don't imitate Irving.'

"Du Maurier retired and I took his place.

"'I am very sorry, Lawrence,' said Tree. 'I hit you an awful rap on the head, but after all you deserved it. Remember it was Shakespeare, my boy—Shakespeare, and you taunted him. I am sorry, however, that you have such a bruise on your head.'

"Tree came over to me and touched the welt. It was only putty and came off on his hands. When he realized that the whole thing was a joke, designed to upset him, he could not refrain from laughter. From that time Tree and I were very good friends, and this friendship exists to this day. My association with him, which began just before we played this practical joke, was one of the pleasantest experiences of my professional life."

HERE ARE THE BROWN EYES
Bessie Barriscale, who will be seen at the Arcadia next week in "Bullets and Brown Eyes."

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