

After the Play

HAVING heard that "The Unborn" is a drama which exploits in a way calculated to create a favorable impression, certain practices which a very large number of people look upon as "the greatest and most pernicious and dangerous peril of our times," Cardinal Farley requested the present Commissioner of Licenses in New York City to stop the play. The Commissioner acceded, and then a judge granted the producers a temporary injunction against him. The play was produced Monday evening at the Princess Theatre.

If the Cardinal and the Commissioner had not taken part in the performance, "The Unborn" might be put aside as a dull play based on pseudo-science and confused in its own good intentions. The scene is the home of a young couple just returned from their honeymoon. They are happy except for the fact that the wife has a morbid fear of bearing a child. There is insanity in her family, and she herself drinks too much wine. She must not have children, she must not, she must not. Enter Billy, the doctor whom she jilted. Jilting has been good for the doctor's character, for his goodness and wisdom pervade the room. Will Billy tell her how not to have children? Billy, being a stage doctor, will not tell her, though she is obviously rich enough to be told. So the young wife grows dizzy, and Billy the doctor goes out murmuring significantly "nausea in the morning."

Jeff, the husband, comes in and quarrels with his wife over the abstract question of children. He shouts and she faints, and his mother tells him that "Yes ... thank God".... The wife overhears this terrible news, and as soon as she is alone telephones to Billy the doctor asking him whether he will do her the very greatest favor. The second act is twenty years later, and it is clear that Billy the doctor didn't, for there is now an epileptic son named Lenox. He is a rather gruesome young man who presses home the lessons of eugenics for two acts by trying to burn up a poodle dog and choke his ex-fiancée. He kills himself in the end.

The intention of the author was to argue that women should know how to prevent the conception of unfit children. This is what the Cardinal objected to. He didn't say that the play was rather a bore. He didn't object to the backstairs science which assumes that if a mother hates an unborn child that child will hate her when it grows up. He didn't object because there was a single incident in the play which wasn't rigorously decent. For "The Unborn" is not the kind of play from which people go forth to a life of sin. They are far more likely to shiver and go home. No, what the Cardinal objected to was not that the play makes sin alluring, but that it makes certain statutes based on certain ecclesiastic taboos rather unpleasant to the imagination.

But what I should like to know is how Commissioner Bell's mind worked in this crisis. New York will stand a good deal on the stage. Any night you can see almost any kind of immorality made attractive; crooks, swindlers, get-rich-quick men, are, on the whole, the heroes of the contemporary American drama. In "The Birth of a Nation" we tolerated a spectacle so poisonous to good will that one wonders whether there is any gallantry left in our democracy. We have endless farces devoted to getting drunk, walking into the wrong apartment, waking up in the wrong bed. But when a group of serious men and women want to discuss the future of the race in a solemn and uninteresting way, the church says nay, and the state submits.

The most interesting part of the evening was a short speech by Dr. Haiselden of Chicago. It was a delight to discover that he is utterly incapable of making a speech, that whatever else he may be he is not a talking doctor. He was most horribly uncomfortable standing up before an audience. His speech came in squirts, for he had tried to memorize it, and it made him tired to have forgotten so much of it. Everybody loved him because he couldn't find where he was in his typewritten manuscript, and his stiff kid gloves kept him from turning the pages. He is a tall angular American, all homespun and no lace. He looks as Senator La Follette might look if he lengthened out and ceased to be an orator. But what Dr. Haiselden said I do not remember. It seemed at the time a jumble of superb sincerity and extreme unworldliness. Yet the man aroused immediate trust and affection, because he is part of the authentic virtue of America. When he said that he wanted the Americans to be a virile people, not a nation of degenerates, you could almost smell the background of corn and hogs and sober piety which he had in mind.

Dr. Haiselden said enough on Monday night to make one wish that he would be very sparing in his public utterances. He has not the sophistication to find his way through the tangles of publicity. He is one of those sincere, shrewd men, so common in America, who are insensitive to people of a different psychology. Dr. Haiselden has clever enemies, and traps will be laid for him.

W. L.

VERSE

The Room Over the River

Good-night, my love, good-night;
The wan moon holds her lantern high,
And softly threads with nodding light
The violet posterns of the sky.
Below, the tides run swift and bright
Into the sea.

Odours and sounds come in to us,
Faint with the passion of this night;
One little dream hangs luminous
Above you in the scented light;
Roses and mist, stars and bright dew
Draw down to you.

How often in the dewy brake,
I've heard above the sighing weirs,
The night-bird singing for your sake
His lonely song of love and tears;
He too, sad heart, hath turned to rest,
And sleep is best.

Flower of my soul! Let us be true
To youth and love and all delight.
Clean and refreshed and one with you
I would be ever as to-night,
And heed not what the day will bring,
Nor anything.

And now the moon is safe away,
Far off her carriage lampions flare,
Lost in the sunken roads of day,
They vanish in the icy air.
Good-night, my love, good-night,
Good-night.

CUTHBERT WRIGHT.

Books and Things

ONCE an aged man from Salt Lake City, after listening to the story of my life, countered by telling me the story of his. He said one thing that I remembered. When a boy at college he earned money in his vacations by being a waiter at summer resorts. During the summer after his sophomore year he became so proficient in his art and gave so much satisfaction that a man from Utah asked him to spend the next vacation at a large country place. "All that summer I waited," said the autobiographer, "and the dinners were many and large. The family was numerous. Although the incessant talk was evidently successful I never found it funny or even interesting, and used to wonder how these people could stand it. But later in life, when I was no longer a waiter, when I had become intimate with this same family, and had even married a few of its members, when I sat in the very chairs I had once stood behind, I found the talk most acceptable. The jokes that once had flattened themselves against my ears became good jokes. Queer thing, isn't it?"

Very likely I thought it rather queer at the time, for I hadn't then read the cases Bergson uses as illustrations, in his book on Laughter, of the law by which A, who is inside a given circle, laughs or weeps at things which leave B, who is outside the circle and therefore only an overhearer, quite unmoved. See for example the story of the French peasant who sat stolid through a funeral, although the preacher made everybody else cry, and who said simply, when asked why he wasn't crying too, "I don't belong in this parish." I was reminded of this story, which I'm not sure I've quoted correctly, a few days ago, on a sleeper from Chicago to New York. Two or three sections ahead there was an elderly New Yorker with a clear voice and leisure to use it. He was talking to a young man who sold typewriters in Duluth. "We have flattered ourselves," said the New Yorker, "that the barbarities of the wars of two or three thousand years ago would not be repeated at the present time because of the elevation of the sentiments which during the last century or the last half century have generally obtained. We have flattered ourselves that enlightened diplomacy as practised by those statesmen of various nationalities who are known as diplomats had devised certain general propositions known as international law which would prove adequate to the task of restraining what was left of those barbarous impulses which we have partially inherited from our ancestors within certain fixed or shall I say measurably fixed bounds." Here a passing freight put out all other noises. The young man from Duluth drew a cigar from his pocket. "Shall we go and smoke?" he asked, when the freight was over. "I no longer smoke," said the New Yorker. "The sensitiveness of my nervous organization has compelled me to discontinue the practice." Naturally I expected the younger man to make a break for the smoker, but he didn't. For three-quarters of an hour more he sat tight, his cigar in his hand, and listened while that endless New Yorker talked on about the war. The Duluth young man was really attentive. "I have been very much interested," I heard him say. "You've made a wonderful study of this subject. I appreciate it very much."

When at last the young man took himself off, and the car was as quiet as a car can be, I had leisure to reduce the incident to law. The best I could do was this: Had I been sitting in the same section with the elderly New Yorker I

should have been as interested in his talk as the young man from Duluth was. Had the young man from Duluth been in my section and merely overhearing he would have been neither more nor less bored than I. For convenience, you see, I am assuming that the young man and I are interested by the same things and bored by the same things, that the only difference between us was in our geographical position in the sleeper. Unless one makes assumptions like this it is sometimes hard to find in what happens illustrations of the laws one has read about.

In the evening, however, after the young man from Duluth had gone to bed, I came upon a truth slightly different and I think more important. While the porter was making up my berth I sought asylum in the smoker, where two stricken passengers, weary and kindly, were listening to the New Yorker's talk: "This war may perhaps be described most aptly as a war of attrition, a term that does not seem to be generally understood. Attrition signifies the using up of a nation's store of men and money and food. It is derived from a Latin word which means to diminish by rubbing. Bearing this in mind, I can interpret the action of Bulgaria only by supposing her statesmen are convinced that the progress of the German arms will have been sufficient to bring about a peace which might be called favorable to the Central Empires before that process of attrition or lessening by rubbing away has reduced Germany's supply of money and food and especially men to a point where she may be compelled to make peace upon terms more favorable to the Entente powers in order to avert a disaster which, if we estimate its effects upon the domestic economy of the great Teutonic Empire, might well be deemed irretrievable. In other words, I can interpret Bulgaria's action only by attributing to her titular or actual leaders a belief either that this process of attrition will operate in a sense more favorable to Germany than to the Entente Powers or else that the process which if allowed to proceed uninterruptedly might well exhaust the resources of Germany at a date anterior to the ultimately inevitable exhaustion of her opponents will nevertheless be interrupted by some decisive military achievement on the part of Germany's forces in the field."

After he had gone to bed one of his hearers said to the other, with bitter gratitude: "That's over, thank God!" And by dint of a little meditation I perceived that the reason I had been less bored than they by the old gentleman was that they were more directly exposed to his fire, that they had now and then to make signs of interest, while I could lie back and be as inattentive as I pleased. That the feelings of A, inside the circle, are more acute than the feelings of B, who is outside, is true no matter whether these feelings are of pleasure or of pain—this truth became clear when I looked back to the sleeper, thought of the young man from Duluth, and called my feeling not the opposite of his but merely less pleasurable. Next morning I heard the old gentleman at it again. "That doesn't seem to be generally understood, but it's like this. You are a wheat merchant in Minneapolis. I am a miller at Liverpool. . . . Re-discount under our new or federal reserve system. . . . Since the amount of gold shipped to the United States from foreign countries during the past year is in excess of three hundred millions, and therefore approaches without quite equalling the amount of the original. . . ." But I didn't look at the young man from Duluth, so I don't know what law he was illustrating.

P. L.