

## After the Play

THERE is no good reason why, if you have lost him, you should seek out the T. B. M. But if you should be looking for him, in all the fat prosperity that is mixed up with corn bread and self-sacrifice, you can easily find him, very hot and probably a little drunk, at the eleventh reproduction of the Ziegfeld Follies. He sits at the Follies in rows, red-faced and genial and pop-eyed, his dinner an immediate and pervasive recollection, his drink between the acts a happy prospect. The extent to which he gulps at the semi-naked chorus is the greatest tribute there is to the shrewdness of the leg-show producer. Like a large fish floundering after a butterfly, he yearns toward the pseudo-nudity on the stage. Just how much nudity to give the T. B. M. must be a fine problem for the Ziegfeld management, the dullness of giving too little being apparent and the risks of giving too much being obvious. But nudity is undoubtedly the bait that fetches him to the Follies and it accounts for a good deal of that entertainment's otherwise unaccountable success.

Is there any objection to a semi-naked chorus? Not from me. But I do dislike to see sour, unripe and poisonous entertainment disguised by the over-employment of sex. If the Ziegfeld chorus were clothed in brown jaegers by order of the mayor, the paucity of the entertainment in general would be shockingly revealed. And just because I am not a tired business man in an active state of anti-prohibition I decline to take glimpses of nudity in lieu of every other amusement. The titillation of sex is not of itself a sufficient evening's diversion, not even when the lingerie advertisement becomes incarnate and walks around—as a bride-to-be—on the stage.

As against the humbler variety show, with undertrained chorus and garish setting and shoddy clothes, there is always something to be said for the Follies. In everything that calls for a promoter with money at his command the Follies surpasses the kind of production that was stereotyped years ago. It uses electric light in a hundred ways and uses enough of it to flood a town. It has a large and quite noisy orchestra. The chiffon in one scene alone cost \$3,000 or \$30,000, and in every scene, semi-naked or the reverse, the costumes of the chorus are brilliant, audacious, superb. Whatever Mr. Joseph Urban does in the way of decoration is an attractive substitute for the stuffy settings that he came to banish. The blue distance he so often arranges is itself a fine relief to the theatre eye, and is just one note in his suave decorative scheme. But when these excellences have been dutifully contrasted with the slipshod failings of the older or cheaper musical comedy, something does remain to be said on the score of entertainment.

Two Ziegfeld fans, "released" by whatever firm manufactures these typical New Yorkers, felt it their mission to reinforce the orchestra the night I attended the Follies. Male and female created He them, and the male whistled while the female trilled. Judging by the zeal of this pair, much should be said for the music by Raymond Hubbell and Dave Stamper, and it is only fair in my dullness as to music to insist that this particular music may be excellent of its kind. But if it be agreed that the rhythms of the Ziegfeld Follies are not routine rhythms, repeating on an elaborate scale the rhythms to which the Ziegfeld patrons have long been accustomed, then they are unique in a production where everything else is routine, the routine humor and the routine sensuousness and the routine Manhattanese magnificence. For, in spite of or because of the resources that distinguish this lavish production, there is

nothing about it to suggest that it was produced by creative human beings. It is, on the contrary, institutional—in the sense that a hotel banquet is institutional. And for perhaps that reason, unfortunately, it seems to reach the tired business man where he lives.

It is true that there are oases in the glittering desert. Will Rogers in the wise patter that accompanies his rope-act is thoroughly human and amusing, and there is a small dog managed by Russell Vokes that is extremely funny as an inebriate. For the rest, apart from a rare moment or two, there is nothing in the exhibition of the comedians that is out of routine. Poor Bert Williams has an act which is watered down from all the leaves of past performances, and W. C. Fields merely substitutes tennis for billiards in order to repeat his juggling. Miss Fanny Brice has a good deal of cleverness though not much taste. It is only in her caricature of the Egyptian dancer that her particular kind of coarse humor has its opportunity. Two other comedians, Eddie Cantor and Walter Catlett, try hard, but a dismal memory of bug-humor and jokes about money and the stock representation of effeminacy is all that I can now revive.

There must be a cause for this aridity, aside from the Ziegfeld dependence on the sexual appeal, and I am inclined to think that the biggest cause for it is the undemocratic character of the T. B. M. Of course the T. B. M. will stand for stock patriotism. Few things are more unpleasant than to have patriotism the excuse for tableaux in the Follies, and to have impersonators take off Washington and Lincoln and Wilson, but the business man rejoices in this sort of dreadful literalness and applauds "Can't you hear your country calling?" Where the T. B. M. is limited is in his enslavement to prosperity and the narrowness of the life connected with it, and it is the devotion of the Follies to the preoccupations of the prosperous that makes it so dull, outside of its sexuality. There is nothing humane about any one of the episodes that engross the producers. There is nothing that ventures on such homogeneity as Briggs the cartoonist can count on, or that has a glimmer of the national sentence of George Ade. There is only the showy exhibition of clothes, the "episode of the purse," the "episode of the information bureau," the "episode of the telephone wires," the "episode of New York Streets and Subway"—the purse, the railroad station, the telephone booth and Broadway all being symbols for the externalized existence of the T. B. M. The fact that sentimentality is revealed over the telephone, not money-humor, hardly alters the situation. In the life that Ziegfeld wishes to celebrate there is a place for sentimentality—"episode of the garden of girls."

He is by no means a regular New Yorker, this sympathetic patron of the Follies. Much more often he is a business-seeker and business-dispenser from smaller cities, away from home and hungry for excitement. He is out of his safe reins and blinkers. He has no idea how to entertain himself, and every desire to be entertained. It is in boredom and the restlessness of boredom that he goes to the Follies, almost fatuously ready to be lured and allured.

If the business man were less antisocial there could easily be a leg-show that was also amusing and humane. The present narrowness of his existence, however, tends to keep the Ziegfeld Follies ostentatious and empty and dull. Even genuine comedians like Bert Williams cannot break the crust that keeps forming over the producers of the Ziegfeld Follies—for the real producers, after all, are the business men in front.

F. H.

## Books and Things

**J**OKING aside, as we say when we would notify our hearers that they need not try to look amused any longer, joking aside and seriously speaking, I have an idea.

Let search among college graduates be made, at some rich person's cost, for men and women who have never taught Latin and can read it easily. The meaning of "easily" will have to be determined later, not by me. So will the ages of the men and women to be tested. Let there be a further effort to discover how many of those who can read Latin ever do, and how often. And here, too, as you have already noticed, are terms that call for definition.

Such an inquiry, by revealing the proportion of those who can read and the proportion of those who do read Latin to the whole number that have studied it, would tell us all something. And it would have the contradictory merit of confirming us each in his own opinion. To some among us the result would appear satisfactory; to others so unsatisfactory that Latin must be taught no more; to others so unsatisfactory that Latin must be taught by methods unlike those by which the unsatisfactory result was achieved.

Were I one of those college graduates who read Latin with facility, say as easily and inaccurately as I can read contemporary French prose, I should not much care how few of us there were. Had I pursued the Latin language successfully I should not allow my repose to be disturbed by any altruistic thought of the many boys condemned to pursue Latin without success, boys who so ran that they did not obtain. This, you say, is a poor ego-centric attitude? Evidently. I mention it only because it discloses my regret that I am so ignorant of Latin.

By a second inquiry, conducted by persons who do not believe that Latin should be taught to all boys all of the time, or to no boys any of the time, but who do believe it should be taught to some boys part of the time, we should try to find a way of picking out, rather early in their schooldays, the few who seem likely to catch Latin if properly exposed. I wonder whether this sorting out process might not be called complete after about two years of Latin, taught as I suspect it of being taught at the Perse school? Without knowing why, I believe this minimum of Latin would be a good thing for nearly all boys and girls. And in the case of a few girls and boys I believe, again without knowing why, that ability to read Cicero, Virgil, Livy and Horace would add to the agreeableness of life.

Without knowing why, I say, and should not thus call attention to my ignorance if I thought it exceptional. The less ignorant defenders of Latin owe a duty to the more ignorant. In this country Latin needs a champion who possesses the qualities that he says a knowledge of it fosters. Not only must he be a man obviously different from his fellows: his differences must be such that their roots may be traced down into the Roman humanities. "Aves leur langue concise, précise, frappant des formules comme des médailles, les moralistes et les poètes de Rome ont parlé pour tous les hommes et pour tous les siècles. Aucune éducation esthétique ou littéraire ne tient lieu de celle que donne la sagesse romaine." The ideal champion must have something other than such a familiarity as translations might have given him with Latin literature and the Roman world. Blurred English words, when he uses them with knowledge of their origin, will regain their sharpness of edge. He will write an English he could not have written if he had not loved Latin clearness, listened to

Latin harmonies, grasped the Latin meaning of urbane.

A champion resembling this ideal will not be easy to find. In the hunt for him we must not overlook those whom from search number one we purposely excluded, the men who teach Latin. And although it be hard, when a man knows both Latin and Greek, to separate what he owes to Athens from what he owes to Rome, for practical purposes we shall have to consider the men who know both languages.

If, for example, friends should urge the claims of Professor Paul Shorey to the champion's vacant post, and if they should admit, when offering *The Assault on Humanism* as an example of his style, that he knew as much Greek as Latin, I for one should not on this account think of voting against letting him act in public as champion of the younger tongue. Later, when I had read *The Assault on Humanism*, and had begun to regret my vote, I should regret it not because I found Professor Shorey too Greek to be Latin. My regret would spring from doubt, and my doubt from such a sentence as this: "There were brave men living before Agamemnon; and educational reformers who had the courage of their insensibilities before Mr. Flexner. He stands in the momentary limelight, the transient American embodiment of a recurrent type, exhibiting as the first pledges of a new science of education the iconoclasm of Tom Paine's Age of Reason, and the arguments against Latin of the chapter on Education in the fourth Discourse of Helvetius's *De l'Esprit*." This passage gives you the key to Professor Shorey's defect as a defender of the humanities. His book wants grace, it is a thing of little ease. He is polemical in these essays, and as a polemist he is not humane. His voice is thin, a little shrill, more than a little discourteous in its inflections.

By the way, perhaps I ought to confess that Professor Shorey refers two or three times to the *New Republic*, and that these references may have prejudiced me against his English style. I prefer, nevertheless, to hope that prejudice did not dictate my aversion from sentences like this: "Neither irony, nor rhetoric, nor argument will make any dent in the carapace of minds case-hardened in the formulas of an a priori evolutionary philosophy of progress against all direct, immediate and peremptory perception of absolute beauties and finer shades of truth." We journalists may be forgiven for such a neglect of cadence, but shouldn't a defender of the humanities give more heed to the falling of his clauses?

No, as a defender of the humanities Professor Shorey will never do. Then why drag him in? For two reasons. "Some years ago," he says, "I debated a similar [educational] question with President Eliot at the meeting of the Association of American Universities. He paid no attention to my paper at the time, and he now writes in the *Atlantic* in total disregard of the entire literature of the subject." My first reason, you see, is a wish to escape the fate of President Eliot, whose first step toward "total disregard" was innocent inattention to Professor Shorey.

My second reason is that *The Assault on Humanism* begins a series of *Atlantic Monographs*, from whose substance I expect as much pleasure as I have got from the form of the first. Each monograph is to be a reprint from the *Atlantic Monthly*. It costs only sixty cents—an attractive slender volume, excellently printed on excellent paper, bound in boards. I have only one complaint to make: the Scotch granite of the binding is so light in color that it will soil easily. I wish Mr. Sedgwick would give us something darker.

P. L.