

The SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE SECTION

A Magazine for your Reading Table

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS' PAGE

DIRT is only matter in the wrong place," says the philosopher. So, a nuisance is a person or an act in the wrong place.

It is proper and legitimate for a man to beat time to music with the tip of his boot in a bar-room, but it becomes a nuisance when he beats time on the back of your seat while you are trying to enjoy the play.

When a man pays for his seat in the theatre he buys the right to enjoy the play. The manager carries out his part of the agreement when he furnishes a comfortable chair, and the actor is doing the best he can to carry out his part. In depriving your neighbor of the rights he has paid for, you are not only ill-bred but dishonest. You may claim that you did n't think, if he rebuke you, but in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases this is untrue, and in no case is it an excuse. You would not knowingly pick a man's pocket perhaps, but by your boorish acts you not only make his life a burden but you help to create an atmosphere of discord that carries across the footlights and is reflected in the impaired work of the actor. Thus you steal from your neighbor in a double sense!

If you be a female boor, you may have a weakness for letting those about you know that you are familiar with the airs of the opera, but if you hum these while the prima donna is singing you make yourself a nuisance of the worst type. Audibly to anticipate the development of the play is inexcusable, since it deprives your neighbor of his right to enjoy suspense and surprise, the two essential qualities of the drama. Especially in psychological plays, which one requires his undivided faculties to appreciate, is the talker a nuisance. It is generally a woman who talks for the benefit of her neighbors and is roundly, if silently, cursed for her pains.

Oh, why do people so often curse to themselves!

The Woman In the Case

When women were compelled to remove their hats a big stride was made in the direction of decency, but women are still the chief offenders in the matter of bad breeding in the theatre. They seem to think that the money they pay for a ticket purchases a license. The rustling of candy box paper in the hands of irresponsible women has proven such a nuisance that people should be forbidden to bring this article into the theatre. One such thoughtless or selfish person can exasperate a whole zone of auditors.

Then there is the nervous male bore who rattles his program folding and unfolding it incessantly. The man who drums with his feet or cane, either at a musical play or during the orchestra performance at a drama should be summarily put out.

In some theatres ushers even, standing back of the seats, talk in an undertone, which greatly



THE THEATRE NUISANCE

By

David Warfield

word, one on which much may depend, comes a loud, boorish cough, blotting the whole thing out, so to speak—destroying the scene—marring the whole play. This is no exaggeration. Such a nuisance is the cough that I watch for it, I feel it coming on—that hack! hack! hack!—just before it begins. I pause and let him get over it.

A Universal Pest

It is a universal paradox that vanity, which usually prompts people to be attractive, causes them to come late to the play just to make a stir, a show, disorganizing a row of persons, annoying the whole house, causing a let-down in the work of the players, and on the whole making themselves most offensive.

It is a curious thing that deadheads are often the worst offenders in the theatre. They seem to forget that they are objects of managerial generosity which fact carries with it a certain obligation of decorum.

The deadhead, in other words, seems to be guided by the same principle that influences the great mass of people who most frequent our city parks and promenades and who display the most selfish forms of vandalism—scattering broadcast newspapers and unsightly remains of luncheons and other debris. New York is said to be the greatest sufferer in this respect, because it harbors the greatest number of aliens.

The theatre boor is peculiar to no country. Some Continental writers credit England with the choicest variety—all the way from the gentleman in the stalls who talks to the semi-barbarian in the pit who boos. But England has an aristocracy from which to select. King Edward made valiant, but vain, efforts to check the evil in London. But the right to be a nuisance was a prerogative which the British aristocracy would not be denied, even by royal injunction. We have a report of an American actor of English birth over there stepping to the footlights and rebuking, in very plain English, a party of titled persons in the stalls who, by their chatter, were making intolerable nuisances of themselves.

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