

The French Senate Gravely Alarmed At Parisian Wickedness.

**Remarkable Debate in Which
Many Law Makers Declared That
Shameless Plays
Were Causing
Widespread Social
Corruption and
Threatening the
Downfall of France**

PARIS, July 15.

THE level of shamelessness in act and language on the Parisian stage has now gone to extremes never before attempted.

So flagrant has become the disregard of all restraint that the matter has engaged the earnest attention of the great French Senate, the highest legislative body in France. The Senators agreed almost unanimously that the unbounded license of the French stage was intimately bound up with other causes that threatened the destruction of the French nation. Immoral plays, they found, help to destroy the sanctity of family life, to promote the tendency to race suicide, to corrupt innocent girls and children and to favor the ravages of tuberculosis and other diseases.

"I accuse these conscienceless theatrical managers of destroying the souls and bodies of our dear children for the sake of money," exclaimed one Senator.

It is understood that the performance which inspired many of the Senators in their denunciation of the Parisian stage was the current "revue" at the Folies Bergere. In this there is a scene which is supposed to caricature the current fashions.

The actresses who represent the fashion models were dressed in costumes similar to those worn by society, but lacking something here and there. In the background were some sixty girls, arranged with their backs entirely bare and turned toward the spectators. They were ranged in tiers that rose high up on the stage, making a startling spectacle against a black velvet background. Individual lights were turned on the back of each actress, throwing it into bold relief.

The outrageously dressed fashion models passed in a procession before this background of bare backs, producing indescribable effects. Many of the spectators showed strong disapproval, although at a place of entertainment that was always frivolous.

This scene, although in comparison one of the more innocuous, so aroused one Senator's indignation that he rose up in protest.

American readers have already heard of the astonishing performance of "Ogo Vadis," at the dignified Opera, in which a distinguished prima donna appeared with an equally undignified professional wrestler.

How the French Senate discussed and condemned the prevailing license of the Parisian stage can best be understood by reading these extracts from the official report of that body's proceedings:

"The President of the Senate—The order of the day calls for a discussion by Senator de Lamarzelle and several of his colleagues on the objectionable character of many theatrical performances and the licentiousness of theatrical posters in France at the present moment.

"Senator de Lamarzelle—I feel in advance that my task is going to be a very difficult one. I shall use as much delicacy as possible, but I must speak plainly. Let us first consider the titles of the plays which one can read to-day on the posters which cover nearly all the walls of our capital. They tell us that the children are not hurt by shocking plays because they do not see them. That is really a bait to attract the general public, but the children do see the posters.

"Here, for instance, is 'Love Prowls,' which is described as a light operetta, and is really much worse. Last year, you remember, we had 'The Very Salty Revue,' and the year before that it was 'The Salty Revue.' You see that we are steadily progressing.

"Here is another poster: 'Everything for Love.' In connection with that there

Spectacles of Bare-skinned Dancers Hurling One Another About the Stage, As in the Large Picture, Have Become Common at High-Class Places of Entertainment Like the Opera. On the Right and Left Are Two Examples of Somewhat Underdressed Parisian Actresses Who Have Excited the Wrath of the Senate.

is a picture, to which I will refer later, called 'The Bedtime of the Ingenues.' Other pieces whose titles speak for themselves are: 'The Revue Without Chemise,' 'My Sister Wants a Sweetheart'; finally, I have the poster of a new theatre which calls itself 'The Libertine Theatre.'

"I will read you some lines from this poster: 'Libertine Opera in three acts: The sixty-five temptations. Third act, the orgy, on the bridge of love, procession of voluptuous bayaderes.' (Here there are movements of smothered laughter among the Senators.)

"I assure you, gentlemen, that there is nothing laughable in this matter. (Loud cheers.)

"Senator Lintilhac—These are laughs of

censure.

"Senator de Lamarzelle—I learned the other day that this poster of the Libertine Theatre had been withdrawn. Every one has his little pride, and I said to myself that my announced appeal to the Government had something to do with this action.

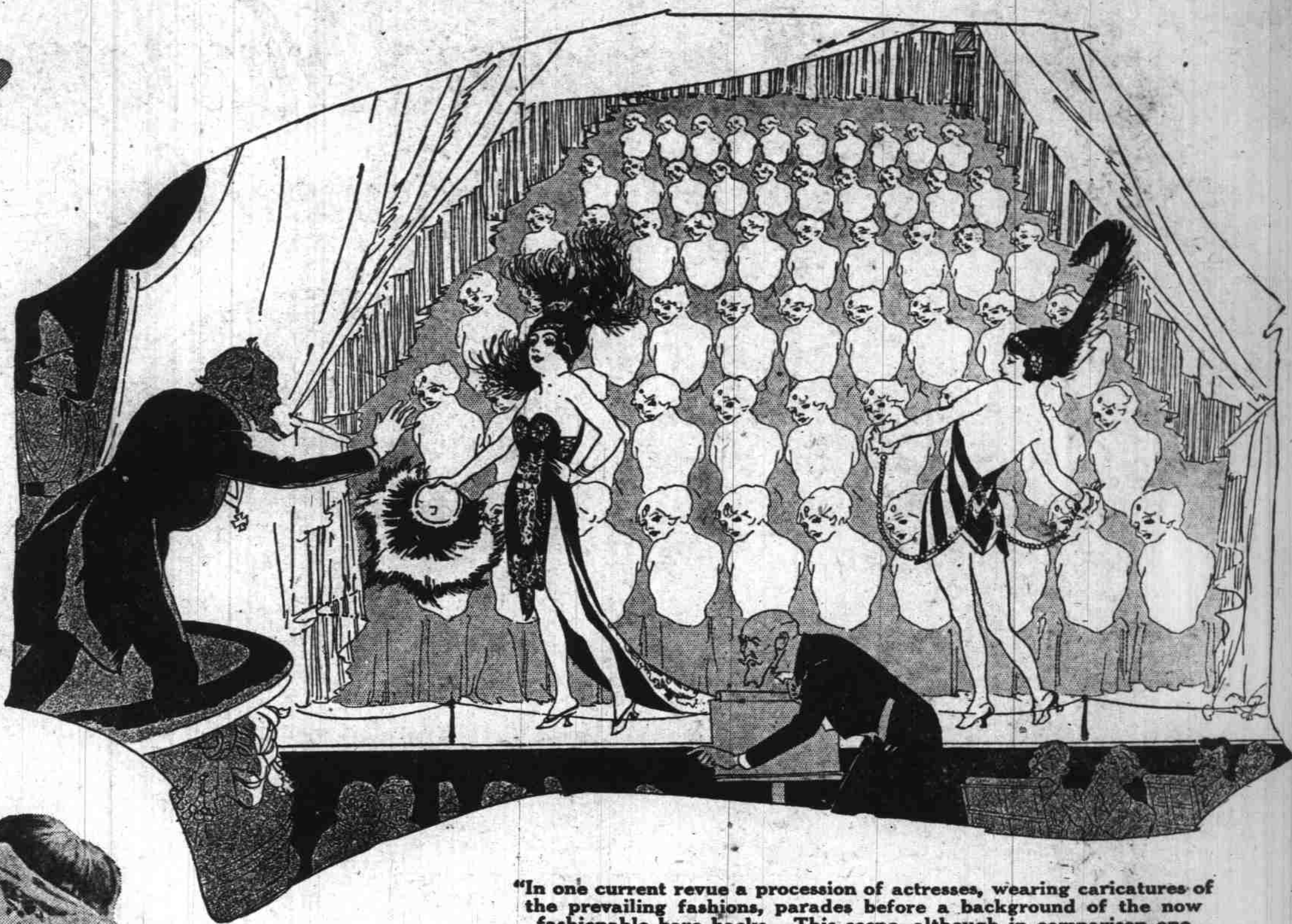
**A Parisian
Artist's Satiric
Caricature
of the
Costuming of a
Popular
Stage
Favorite.**

But this satisfaction was soon taken from me. Indeed, I found that the piece at this theatre had been changed for a worse one! (Loud exclamations of disapproval.)

"This is a spectacle on an enormous scale. Once more I ask your pardon for offending your ears, but I am obliged to cite details. Here is a list of scenes: 'The madness of love, the competition of

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"In one current revue a procession of actresses, wearing caricatures of the prevailing fashions, parades before a background of the now fashionable bare backs. This scene, although in comparison one of the more innocuous, so aroused one Senator's indignation that he rose up in protest."



A "Living Advertisement" for One of the Objectionable French Plays Which Have Aroused a Storm of Resentment in Paris.

to which our theatrical directors have descended? They find that there is a public which has grown satiated even with their outrageous obscenities, and to please this public they have descended to plays which exploit the vice of cruelty. These plays are now, indeed, very much in fashion. I will quote you some remarks on this subject from one of our most distinguished and respected critics, M. Adolphe Brisson:

"The whole audience thrilled with excitement at the sight of a child writhing under the knife of a brute, while another brute stood ready to receive the blood of the murdered little one in a pail. A few cries of horror greeted this barbarous spectacle. The author of the piece and the director of the theatre were delighted with a success which they hardly hoped would be so complete." (Loud exclamations of disgust.)

"I call attention to another poster which shows a woman with convulsed face and back entirely covered with the marks of a recent whipping.

"A few months ago I was horrified by an operetta entitled 'The School of the Satyrs,' one of the most abominable things it is possible to imagine. Now, I am further shocked to hear that this operetta has been exported to London, where it has made an immense success, thus identifying our beloved country with this kind of production. And now I am amazed to find that the director of 'The School of the Satyrs' has been made an officer of the Legion of Honor. (Exclamations of amazement.)

"Senator Revelland—He should be a Knight of the Legion of Horror!

"Senator de Lamarzelle—Not the least harmful feature of the tendency of our theatre is the degradation it inflicts upon our actresses and actors. At the risk of provoking some smiles, I declare to you that many of our actresses feel the deepest indignation at the parts which they are forced to play. It appears that when the managers make a contract with these unfortunate women they hold back a forfeit of two thousand or three thousand francs. Then the actresses are told unexpectedly that they will have to play without clothing. The poor women protest, saying: 'But we cannot do that, we are married women.' Then the manager says: 'Oh, very well, you will lose the forfeit.'"

"Senator de Lamarzelle cited many other details of objectionable theatrical performances which it would be impossible to repeat here, details which were necessary to convince legislators that new laws must be passed to deal with the evil. The

Senator went, for instance, into considerable detail concerning an outrageous scene in "The School of the Satyrs," which involved the degrading employment of little girls of ten and twelve years.

With a great wealth of facts and convincing arguments the Senator reviewed the whole field of immoral plays and posters and objectionable public displays of all kinds. He showed how they were degrading the youth, breaking up family life, destroying the strength of France and injuring her reputation abroad.

Finally, he linked up the immorality of public spectacles with the neo-Malthusian propaganda, the mania of race suicide, which appears to be flourishing strongly in France. He showed that the corruption spread by demoralizing spectacles injured the health of the community, destroyed the love of family and favored the growth of tuberculosis, opium smoking and many diseases and vices. Here is a brief passage from this part of the debate:

"Senator de Lamarzelle—The commentary on this propaganda of licentiousness and corruption is to be found in the official publications which prove the falling of our birth rate from year to year. It is to be found in the comparative statistics of France and Germany. In the latter country there is unfortunately a regular increase of population. I beg you to recall the eloquent words uttered in this chamber by M. Clemenceau on October 11, 1919.

"This treaty does not provide that France shall undertake to have many children, but that is the first thing that should have been put in the treaty, for if France fails to have numerous families you will in vain take away all the cannon of Germany, you will in vain attempt any action you please, for France will be lost because there will be no more Frenchmen." (Loud applause.)

"You hear that, gentlemen: 'France will be lost.' Several other Senators followed with additional facts and arguments along the line laid down by Senator de Lamarzelle. Nobody seriously questioned the damaging charges made against the French theatre. The Minister of the Interior admitted that a most deplorable condition existed and that the Government found difficulty in making any improvement. As a final result of the debate the Senate passed a resolution calling upon the Government to use all its powers to suppress immorality in theatrical performances and public posters, and directing the drafting of new laws giving the Government all additional powers that might be necessary.