

# A STAGE TALE OF TWO CITIES

**E**VEN in the Europe of to-day, there is some amusement, and one of the factors in providing this change of scene are the theatres of Paris and London. There is much greater theatrical activity in the English metropolis than in the French capital, but the stage continues to figure prominently in the life of both cities. In London, and in Paris also, to a less extent, the "revue" is the prevailing "mode." Amid some farces and a few serious pieces, the lavish music hall, with its lights, its colour and its music, is the lodestone for the crowds. The reason is quite obvious. Reaction, a solace. In the revue houses, soldiers and their dependents, munition workers and officials, forget the war.

There is one exception—the movies, or "cinemas," as they call them over there. And war, war, war—that's what the public wants to see in the movies. Both the French and British Governments are officially trying to satisfy the demand, by providing moving pictures of the front and actual battle scenes, which, I believe, surpass in interest, any motion pictures hitherto produced, not excepting the "Birth of a Nation," or any of the other classics of the shadow stage. We saw both the French and English views of the Battle of the Somme, the former in Paris, the latter in Birmingham, and no adjective or set of adjectives could describe the profound impression those pictures made upon the audiences.

As for the regular theatres, I saw quite a variety in Paris. The Opera was closed, but the Opera-Comique was open, where I heard one of the newer operas. "Madame Sans-Gene," well sung by a capable cast. On the same programme was a ballet, "Lumiere and Papillon," dainty and artistic as "light" and "butterflies" themselves.

**T**HE Folies-Bergere, one of the standard institutions of Paris, was in full swing, with a revue featuring two of the leading music hall artists of France, Mistinguett and Magnard. The show, on the whole, was not as sprightly nor as interesting as a good Winter Garden production in New York.

The "Theatre des Ambassadeurs," in the Champs-Elysees, a summer revue garden, presented an entertainment so lifeless and dull that it was a choice between going to sleep, or going for a walk in the woods. "Marigny," also in Champs-Elysees, had high class varieties, with the famous dancer, Sahary-Djeli, in a glorious French Italian conceit, "The Dances of the Perfumes."

One of the most characteristically French theatres is the "Grand Guignol," the theatre of horrors, and there I did see something to make me sit up and keep awake. There have been several efforts to transplant the atmosphere of the Grand Guignol to New York, with varying degrees of success, but in Paris it flourishes without any artificial forcing.

As I looked at the "Chateau of Slow Death," with the most terrifying and horrible episodes following each other in rapid succession, culminating every little while in a regular orgy of frightfulness; as I shrank back, gripping the arms of the seat, not only

## A Canadian Sizes Up London and Paris in War Time

Did you ever notice that an Ibsen play made you want to go out afterwards for a "time," while a comic opera or a revue made you feel sad? An explanation is found in the article below

B y D O N H U N T



Elsie Janis teaches young society women in New York some new turns in dancing. For social purposes? Oh, no. These young societyettes do not perch themselves so informally just to learn dancing. The aim is to give a huge performance in New York for the benefit of some of the Allies war funds. And Elsie the inimitable is devoting her talents for the purpose.

from the strain of the play, but much more from the blood-curdling cries and hysterical sobs of women all about me in the audience, at first I asked myself, "What's the use? Haven't these poor Parisians trouble enough as it is, without looking for more in the theatre?"

But then, in this modern Athens, I remembered Aristotle and his theory of the tragic "katharsis"—that the dire horrors of the Greek tragedies, by raising fear and purging it by the very act of raising it, were comforters rather than disturbers of men's minds. As these people left the Grand Guignol, freed at last from the fearful atmosphere of the Chateau of Slow Death, with men and women, too, dying every few minutes, sometimes several at once, and suicides and murders in lavish profusion, they would probably feel that Paris, with all its sadness, was at least a happier place to live in than the Chateau, and they would take heart again. Whereas, on the other hand, to come from the froth and gayety of the Folies Bergere, into the dismal streets of the war-time Paris at night, was to feel heavy depression closing all around.

In London, next to the war, the "Bing Boys" were the chief subject of conversation, and the Alhambra, where these funny brothers held forth, in the persons of George Robey and Alfred Lester, with Phyllis Monkman and Violet Lorraine as their companions in merriment, was in a constant state of siege. Ask any Canadian, or Australian, or South African, or Englishman either, on the streets of London, where the Bing Boys are, and they will tell you, even if, in the case of strangers, they are ignorant of the location of the Houses of Parliament. The audience at the Alhambra, an immense and scintillating auditorium, has all the dash and brilliance, the fashion and the eclat, which can only come in the world's metropolis, even in war-time.

Then there was "Bric-a-Brac," at the Palace, with "Gertie Millar" and "Teddie Gerrard," and again a tremendous crowd, appreciative with boisterous good-humour. Zepps may come and Zepps may go, but

the revue houses of London need not care.

At the Gayety Theatre, where, in the stalls, you feel quite sure that the man beside you is a duke, and the lady across the aisle, either a duchess or a countess, was the original "To-night's the Night," a copy of which we had already seen in Canada. Even in war time, the Gayety chorus looks as if it could provide appropriate brides for the aristocracy, as it has done so nobly in the past.

**"J**OYLAND," at the "Hippodrome," was as soporific as the "Theatre des Ambassadeurs" in Paris, but the varieties at the Coliseum made one regain his faith in the ability of the stage to entertain. On one bill to see Fay Compton, Lydia Kyasht, and Arthur Bouchier was to realize that there was such a thing as glorified vaudeville, even if the English did not call it that.

There was something in London beside singing and dancing—"Fish-pingie," for example, at the Haymarket, under the direction of Frederic

Harrison, a fragrant comedy-drama of rural England, played with a subtlety and charm that captivated London for many months. In this play was one of the ablest of English actors, Mr. Henry Ainley.

The theatre is a much greater social institution in London and Paris than it is in America. There may be some theatres in Canada, for example, where the audience goes for a promenade between the acts, or, in the case of a revue, whenever they feel like it, but I haven't found such a place. Here most men, and practically all the ladies, sit stolidly in their seats from the time they enter the theatre until they leave it. Some men do go out between the acts, but there is always the feeling, or at least there was before the sixteenth of September, that it was rather a devilish thing to do, and that the culprit either was going out to get a drink, or was going to associate with other men who did have such a wicked intention. The result of this prejudice against moving about in our theatres is to prevent any conversation or social badinage, except among those people sitting in adjacent seats.

**I**N Europe, however, everyone, men and women alike, move about, and, particularly between the acts, walk up and down the promenades, which, in many theatres, are delightfully artistic in their architecture. At the Marigny, in Paris, for instance, you walk around an open-air colonnade, adorned with sculpture, and overlooking the beautiful gardens of the Champs-Elysees. At the Opera-Comique, not only are there interior promenades, glorious to look upon, but you can stand out on a number of balconies, overlooking rather squalid but most intensely interesting streets, with Balzac-looking characters walking about. At the Grand Guignol, in the intervals between the terrifying acts, everyone roams around the building, listens to the woman playing the piano in one of the lounges, or walks outside in the long entrance way leading from the street, lined on both sides by sombre, dark-looking high walls, with the black leaves and branches of trees