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THE PLAYS THEY PLAY

"The Pelican"

Some bad plays (and films) are worth seeing—not as drama, but as "social documents." "The Pelican," by F. Tennyson Jesse and H. M. Harwood (Royalty Theatre), is one of these.

Considered as a play it is sentimental melodrama of a quite old-fashioned kind, "modernised" by the borrowing of certain details of its plot from the notorious Russell case.

Everything and everybody in it—from the aged and apologetic British general whose senile ramblings provide the pathos for the central scene, to the French Jew financier who loves his stenographer (with strictly honourable intentions)—is romanticised good and plenty.

The play takes its title from the legend that the female pelican feeds her young on occasion with drops of her own blood; and its theme is mother love, and the sacrifices this may entail—among the best people, of course. The lady pelican in this case has been divorced by her soldier spouse and her child declared illegitimate. She devotes herself to the boy's upbringing, even going so far as to work for a wage in order to do this properly. Naturally, her employer falls in love with her, and the perfect happiness which has been so long denied her seems at last within reach. But Husband No. 1 reappears; and, recognising that the son (now in flannel trousers and with a deep-hereditary—craving to be a British officer) is unmistakably his, he beseeches the poor lady to marry him again in order that the boy may be re-legitimised and enter the Army under the most favourable auspices.

Note the dreadful alternatives before the poor pelican-ess: if she marries her financier the boy remains a bastard and must make his own way in his profession, on his own merits, and unaided by any G.H.Q. influence; whereas if he enters bearing his real papa's name—papa being well up in the War Office—his path will be one of roses. Authors and audience alike accept this as a really tragic situation. So does the poor lady. And after a liberal allowance of hysterics she makes her sacrifice, the unfortunate financier is left out in the cold, and young Hopeful walks over his mother's face to Sandhurst and a doubtless glorious career.

I pick up an elementary science textbook and read: "In the mammal the care of the parent for its young has been one of the most important influences in bringing about the development of higher and higher types." It seems a pity that in the particular instance recorded by the authors of "The Pelican," so much care should go to the development of nothing higher than an ordinary B.P.

MACHEATH.

BOOK REVIEW

Labour & Empire

By WM. PAUL

"Cancer of Empire." By Wm. Bolitho. Putnam's and Sons. Illustrated. 2s. 6d.

If anyone is anxious to know what is behind the so-called "extreme" attitude of the Red group of Labour M.P.'s from the Clyde, let them read "Cancer of Empire," by Wm. Bolitho. This small book does not, of course, state the whole problem; and it is unable to propound any concrete solution. But it does serve to show, most vividly, that capitalism is in a cleft stick.

If the present system has to continue it can only do so by further depressing the standard of living of the already pauperised and un-housed masses. If the workers are determined to get houses, food, and clothing—capitalism must go.

It is true, to some extent, that the conditions in Glasgow are more hideous and cruel than in many other cities. This, however, is due to the fact that capitalism on the Clyde has reached its highest form.

The Clyde valley is one of the most compact industrial units in the whole world. The great coal industry of Lanarkshire together with the iron and steel works of Motherwell, Wishaw, &c., send their products down into the ship-building yards and engineering works which line the Clyde from Glasgow to Greenock. Here is a splendid combination of geographical and industrial advantages; and all that capitalism has been able to make of it is Glasgow—"the nearest suburb to hell."

Some of us who have been reared in a Glasgow slum rather tend to view hell as a respectable suburb of the Clyde.

WORKERS AND THE THEATRE

By Huntly Carter

No one has a wider knowledge of the world's theatre than Huntly Carter, who states a new viewpoint regarding the drama.

THE aim of these weekly notes is a unique one. It will be, as far as I know, the first systematic attempt to awaken the theatrical consciousness of the workers in England and to convert them to a full recognition of the great importance of the theatre to the Labour movement.

The notes will constitute a criticism of the capitalist theatre from the Labour standpoint while endeavouring to answer the questions: What is the place of the theatre in the Labour movement? How does it stand? What is its influence on the working class? How can it be organised to check the evil influence of the governing class by making the ideas and principles of Labour and its movement known and intelligible to all?

I say this aim is unique because the general tendency of the English Press is to keep the subject of a Labour theatre out of its columns. Perhaps the Right and the Centre dread it. Probably the Left sheets are not interested in it. I know that some Left editors argue that a Labour theatre does not exist in this country, and therefore the subject is negligible. I remember an enlightened editor of a Lib-Tory paper telling me that once upon a time he tried to form a small theatrical organisation out of a Workers' Sunday school class. The attempt was a failure. "So I should think," I remarked. He added hastily with that characteristic frankness of the Lib-Tory scribe, "It's no use messing about with Workers, they've got no theatrical guts in them."

The remedy for the neglect of a certain class of editor to recognise the cultural potentialities of the English working class is to send them to Russia and compel them to undergo a strict course of the Labour theatre which has been established in that country since the Revolution. It would teach them that the Russian theatre, like Russia itself, is practically controlled by the Workers. The few theatres that are run by private individuals owing to the N.E.P. are largely proletarianised. They are really controlled by the requirements of the Workers. The Worker playgoer is as much opposed to reactionary tendencies in the theatre as the Government themselves.

Recently I received a Moscow theatrical weekly in which I read an account of a furious attack by Workers in the Labour theatrical Press on an academic playhouse which had produced a play unsympathetic towards the Labour movement. The result was that the play was quickly withdrawn.

(Continued in next column)

What it means to be able to survive in a Glasgow slum may be seen by the official figures showing the relation of housing to the death rate. In one-roomed houses or, as we call them, "single apartments," the

Good Wishes from Barbusse

France.

February 19, 1925.

MY DEAR COMRADE,—I am very glad to learn that you have begun a Sunday newspaper for the Workers. There is no better and more valuable work than that. It is by organs of this kind that the great masses, who hold all the future in their hands, can be gradually enlightened, showing them by the living interest of works of art and by documented articles the reality of things.

I send my warmest wishes for the success of your new publication on whose editorial staff I have seen the names of several of my friends and comrades. I shall be glad to collaborate on the SUNDAY WORKER.

Yours fraternally,
HENRY BARBUSSE.

death rate for males of all ages (1909-12) was 27.26 per thousand.

As breathing space is increased, by the addition of other rooms, the death rate falls. Thus, males living in a two-roomed house die at the rate of 17.07. It falls again for those in four-roomed houses to 12.89. Again, quoting the figures given in the "Cancer of Empire," we find:—

For women, those in one-room apartments died at the rate of 24.90; those in two-roomed apartments died at the rate of 16.12. Those in apartments of four rooms and upwards had a death rate of 9.19. Boy babies in one-room apartment houses died in the number of 201.25 per thousand during this period; 163.88 of every thousand boy babies died in two-apartment houses; 102.57 per thousand died in four-room apartment houses. Girls preserved the same proportions, 163.64 per thousand dying in one-roomed apartments; 123.31 in two-roomed apartments; 73.95 in four-room apartment houses.

As Glasgow is capitalism in operation at its highest stage of development, it serves to teach many lessons to the working class movement. When the Clyde leaders demand militant action they are met

(Continued from previous column)

I do not pretend that this kind of war on the theatre is possible in middle-class England. I do not say that a Labour theatre can be organised and worked on Russian lines altogether. What I do say is that the theatre in Russia under the Workers has attained a very high level of expression. That the work of the theatre since 1917 has been far more important than that of the theatre outside Russia. That it has united the theatre with life, has brought a big body of people into the limelight, and has revealed their vital ideals and ideas of the conception, organisation and work of the theatre. Above all it has shown the truth of the fact that any fool can run a theatre with lots of money and make it financially profitable, but it requires the collective skill of the whole people to run a theatre on next to nothing and make it nationally effective.

Both the wide-spread theatrical financial syndicates and the conception and organisation of an English Labour theatre must be examined in the light of the above truth. The box-office is the root of all theatrical evil. A Labour theatre must be separated from the box-office.

CAMERA NOTES

THE capitalist class, long since, realised the tremendous influence of pictures upon men's minds. Pictorial papers have circulations that challenge, and even threaten to outrival, those of the ordinary daily dope press.

So far no serious attempt has been made to counteract this by the Labour Press. The SUNDAY WORKER intends to make a beginning to end this state of affairs. Our paper is not only a newspaper—it is a workers' newspaper. With the help of our readers we hope to make the SUNDAY WORKER a Labour pictorial newspaper.

We will be pleased to receive interesting photos from our readers of any phase of working class life. Such things as evictions, housing conditions and slums, strikes and lock-outs, Labour demonstrations and mass meetings, &c. We don't want "close-up" pictures of leaders; we want photos of the Workers themselves.

For each print that we select and publish we will pay 10s. 6d. Prints should be sent addressed to Photographic Editor, SUNDAY WORKER, 74 Swinton Street, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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with the reply that Labour's policy is one based upon "continuity" and the "inevitability of gradualness." The Glasgow municipality believes in "gradualness"; and its attempts to solve its housing problem have only resulted in the fundamental "continuity" of the disease.

After twenty years of effort our author admits:—
The same revealing differences between the chance of life for the overcrowded and the comfortable still remain.

This means that no matter how the figures rise and fall the relative condition of the masses remains as before.

It is generally assumed that what Glasgow suffers from is a housing problem. In reality, what Glasgow suffers from is capitalism. It is capitalism that caused the modern housing problem; it is capitalism that is preventing the application of the solution. It is not the Reds who say this; this is the confession of our critics. Mr. Bolitho admits:—

This terrible main root of Glasgow's problem therefore leads to the following dilemma: If capital is found for re-housing Glasgow, and houses are built to satisfy the minimum standard of health, the economic rental will always be such that no considerable portion of the 600,000 can pay it... either the workman must live where he is, be forever deprived of light, air space, cleanliness, and all education; all efforts to mitigate this worse than slavery must be cant and money thrown into the gutter; or the employer must go out of business.

Here in the passage we have italicised is the alternative. If the workers must live the system of production for profit must end. This is the crux. There is no escape from it. Therefore, capitalism must go.

MUSIC AND THE CLASS WAR

By Rutland Boughton

Our musical critic, Rutland Boughton, is more than a critic. He is a leader in the recent revival of British music.

A KIND-HEARTED Conservative wrote to me the other day saying, "Music has no politics—or should not have as I always tell you." And if she meant that a Beethoven symphony is equally open for Conservative and Communist enjoyment—well, we need not fall to argument.

But music, no less than bread and the other necessities of life, is produced under capitalist conditions, and either denied to the appetites of the workers, or offered to them in the form of philanthropic dope.

The fact that certain public concerts may be attended by anyone with a little money to spare is beside the mark.

The real music of this world is made less in metropolitan halls than in the homes of the music-lovers, in their choral societies, bands, and other organisations which offer to the individual singer or player those more intense joys which arise in the sweet, precise discipline of concerted music.

Class War in Music

Of course, it is always for the workers to provide such opportunities for themselves, when they have the time and that overflow of living joy which is necessary for the job. But meanwhile it may interest some of our kind conservative enemies to know that in music, as in everything else, it is they, not we, who bring the class war of industrialism into our artistic activities as well. The idea may puzzle some of them at first; but listen:—

Some time ago I visited a little place to conduct one of my compositions. Practically every music-maker in the district had been pressed into service, the regular conductor being an energetic, sensitive, and clever musician. The local musical abilities, vocal and instrumental, were, if anything, ahead of the average.

But, in spite of all this, there was no real living unity in their work. They played together with a polite goodwill as towards myself, but there was none of that responsiveness of one another's work which marks the unified musical organism.

Listen to a good band (all-amateur) and mark the joy of the baritone when the leading cornet safely blows his way through a ticklish passage. Hear a good madrigal choir and realise how each vocal line leans first to one part and then to another. And so in the little town that I visited. It was strange to find such good musical material, such a will to work, and such incohering results. Thinking therefore that the conductor, for all his fine qualities, might lack the practical experience which proves the importance of the work of small units, I wrote afterwards and made certain suggestions for the development and unification of his body of amateurs. And

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then I learned the real cause of the trouble.

The most musically cultured people in the district refused to play with the workers of the district. They could be induced to grant the occasional favours of their help for the excitement of a special "do," but regularly to make music with members of the proletariat—no, that they would not. Their snobbery and anti-worker feeling prevented the formation, for example, of a string-quartet in the town—as the only viola-player was a man who earned his living honestly!

Musical Snobbery

When our cultured friends tell us that music "has no politics," the facts being as they are, we know that any sort of anti-labour politics is also anti-musical.

A fine mess they are making of music to-day, wherever they can ensure that it shall be a thing from which the working intelligence is excluded—out of touch with the sanity of our common human life!

When musicians really had no politics, but were workers with the rest of the producing creatures, then music grew to its noblest, and a guild of music-makers finally produced Bach, the greatest composer the world has known.

With the break-up of the craft guilds, artists of all kinds became more and more the sense-ticklers of the wealthy and lazy ones of the world. And as wealth and laziness sap human vitality, so the artists have been required to put an increasing quantity of aesthetic pepper into their work. Richard Strauss is an example of that. When even that fails to give their patrons a sufficiently novel thrill the most modern artists have had to resort to ideas of death and decay—to an art which suggests childish destruction and nastiness.

Art of the Workers

It is not without significance that the musical leader of this movement arose in Tsarist Russia. The last star turns of the Imperial Russian Ballet were the pieces of Stravinsky. I do not think he has, like Chaliapine, served the Russian people since the Revolution, and, anyhow, it is not likely that they need that sort of service. They, as healthy human beings, intent on a full life, will prefer to make their own art, and make it intelligible while they are about it. And the British Workers also will have to make their own. At some day it may be truly said that art "has no politics"—the day when there is an Art of the Workers and there are none but Workers to make it.

Worse and Worse

On March 2 the number of unemployed persons in Great Britain officially registered was 1,237,700; 1,635 more than the previous week, and 102,958 more than a year ago.