

**PLEASURE TAXED.**

**THEATRICAL MANAGERS' COMPLAINT.**

Theatrical managers still complain bitterly of the continued imposition of the Entertainment Tax (says the Melbourne "Herald"). The effect of the tax, they contend, is to keep many prospective patrons from the theatres and to force a number of the regular attenders from the dress circle and stalls to the cheaper parts of the house. The direct result of this is that plays have a much shorter lease of life and receipts shrink considerably.

"The tax is hitting us so severely," said Mr. George Tallis, recently managing director of J. C. Williamson, Ltd., "that if the measure is not repealed we shall either have to increase the prices of admission or close down altogether."

**INCREASE NOT PASSED ON.**

"The theatrical business is the only one that has not passed on to the public one penny of the huge all-round increase in expenses since the war," he proceeded. "The fact is that the Entertainments Tax alone has prevented this being done. Few people realise that the theatres depend on a very limited section of theatre-goers for their support. Take Her Majesty's for example. Success is made by the same people coming over and over again. The faces of most of our front stall habitués are quite familiar to our artists. Many of them used to come as often as two or three times a week, and the same applied to the gallery, only more so. Thus it can easily be seen how our regular theatre-goers have been affected by the Entertainments Tax. The result is that a great number is visiting the theatre less frequently, and for this reason we do not now get the long runs we used to in pre-war days. It is just the same with the picture theatres, especially the sixpenny and threepenny houses, where the attendances have diminished to the extent of about 30 per cent. since the tax was imposed. After all, there is only a certain amount of money for amusement, and it must be made to go around.

"In other great centres, such as London, New York, and Paris, the theatres mainly depend on transient visitors for their support. In Melbourne, however, this element is infinitesimal in comparison. We have a very small floating population, thus the tax hits the same people over and over again, and is therefore regarded by managers as a real hardship to the industry in this country, and a strong deterrent to theatre-going. It is the realisation of these facts that has prevented managers from passing on to the public a portion of their increased expenses. In New York the price of admission for all musical shows has been increased to three dollars (12s. 6d.), and in order to secure a decent seat it is practically imperative to book through one of the outside ticket bureaux. A fee of 2s. upwards has to be paid on each seat, thus the average price to the public works out at from 14s. 6d. to 16s. In London the average West End price is 10s. 6d. Here we are still playing to pre-war prices, and in some respects there has been a reduction since the war commenced.

**COST OF 'GOODY TWO SHOES.'**

"When, eighteen months ago, Mr. Justice Powers granted the new log submitted by the stage employees and the musicians, he added £26,000 a year to the expenses of J. C. Williamson, Ltd., and not one cent of this has been passed on to the public. During the past four years the cost of our productions has doubled, if not trebled. Our latest pantomime, 'Goody Two Shoes,' cost more than £10,000 before the curtain went up on the opening night, yet 'Mother Goose,' well remembered as one of the most successful pantomimes we have ever produced, cost actually less than £2000 to place it on the stage. Comparing the running expenses of the two productions, we find that 'Goody Two Shoes' cost £500 a week more than 'Mother Goose.'

"When we travel the position is more acute. The increase in fares, freight, and handling charges has hit us probably harder than any other industry in Australia. We used to get a round ticket to New Zealand for £11. Now the round trip for our companies works out at about £24 a head, and the freight and handling charges have gone up enormously. The result is that New Zealand, which used to be a profitable country for

our enterprise, last year cost us £10,000. The position with regard to Western Australia is quite as bad. We used to get return fare for our companies from Adelaide to Perth for £6 per head. Now it costs more than double that amount.

**WAR LOAN EFFORTS.**

"The part the amusement industry has played during the war in keeping up the morale of the people, stimulating public interest in patriotic and other movements, and raising money for war loans, patriotic and other purposes, is well known. Millions of pounds have been raised through this medium. Incidentally it may be recalled to mind that in the theatres in Melbourne and Sydney alone one-twentieth of the whole of the Sixth War Loan was raised (over £2,000,000). For propaganda purposes the theatres and picture shows have placed their resources at the disposal of the War Loan authorities. At all times prior to the war the amusement industry had helped all charitable and public causes, and it has raised many millions of pounds.

"The Entertainments Tax," Mr. Tallis concluded, "is absolutely against the principle of fair taxation, for it is levied upon one section of the community only. People are allowed to indulge in all kinds of sports and luxuries without having to pay taxation thereon, but the comparatively small section of the community which seeks harmless and pleasurable amusement after the day's work is penalised."

**BERT ROYLE'S VIEWS.**

**BREAKING-POINT REACHED.**

Mr. Bert Royle, New Zealand representative for J. C. Williamson, Ltd., when asked by a Wellington "Post" reporter how the proposed increase in prices would be likely to affect New Zealand, replied that, while he had no definite advice from his directors on the subject, up to now none of the enormous increases in expenses had been passed on to the public. Judging by the figures of recent tours, theatrical enterprise was just about reaching breaking point, and something must inevitably be done if they were to "carry on." He mentioned the recent tours of the "Going Up" Company and the Royal Comic Opera Company as instances where, from an attendance point of view, it would be almost impossible to do finer business. Yet there was little or no margin of profit, and the firm ran a very great risk of a loss if the attendance had slackened, even for a night or two. In the case of the Royal Comic Opera Company, fares and freight alone involved a sum of no less than £2700, roughly £50 a night for the length of a New Zealand tour. Other expenses had steadily increased, and were still increasing in the same amazing proportions. Then, again, there was heavy loss through the recent closure of theatres, and the impossibility of getting attractions across from Australia, amounting to many thousands of pounds. Salaries, too, showed a tremendous increase, rendered necessary by the high cost of living to all members of the travelling companies.

The present theatrical prices in Australia and New Zealand, says Mr. Royle, are the cheapest in the whole world. In London and New York the rates are more than double, while even in South Africa they are from 10s. 6d. downwards. "Considering all these things, although we have tried hard to avoid it, until we are one of the very few business concerns which have striven to carry the whole increased burden, passing none of it on to the public, I am afraid we shall have to forestall the traditional 'last straw,' in any case with our more expensive attractions."

When asked his opinion as to what would be the public attitude in the event of an increase in admission prices, Mr. Royle replied, "We should very much regret having to do so, but New Zealanders are not mean, and I am sure do not want their amusements at prices which mean a loss to those who provide them. So long as we continue to cater lavishly, bringing all the best attractions and artists to your theatres, I feel every confidence in the fair-mindedness of the theatre-goers."

One day while waiting by the "phone" To send a message of my own, I heard across the lines a call. In urgent, anxious accents fall— "Is that you, Central? Hurry, do! Please put me on to 2-0-2. It's closing time, I'm late, I'm sure; I'm after Woods' Great Peppermint Cure."

Miss Thelma Petersen, the young New Zealand singer, has had a very busy time during the last twelve months (writes a London correspondent). Last spring she was in France with the Lena Ashwell Concert Party, when the great German attack was made, and in spite of the difficulties and excitement of those critical days the concerts were carried on, the performers often having to sing to the soldiers in the huts in pitch darkness. During the summer season Miss Petersen met with much success

in the English provinces, returning in the autumn for the Queen's Hall promenade season, where she was engaged to sing. Reporting on the latter, the "Daily Telegraph" writes: "Miss Thelma Petersen sang two of Sir Elgar's 'Sea Pictures' with much insight, fervour, and beauty of tone." During the winter Miss Petersen has sung every Sunday at the very popular National Sunday League concerts, and she recently appeared at a large concert in Dublin.



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