

# THEATRES IN WAR-TIME

## *The Importance Of Not Being Earnest*

ONCE the last Great War got under way, it saw one of the biggest theatre booms in history. Civilians, living under the shadow of fear, soldiers back from the front with loads of cares to forget, wanted something to escape into—and the theatre provided that something. In those 1914-18 years, the longest run in the history of the London theatre was gained by *Chu-Chin-Chow* with 2,238 performances.

At the beginning of the second Great War, the Tommies booms-a-daisied off to hang their washing on the Siegfried Line. Now the



BEATRICE LILLIE

She sang "Run Rabbit Run" at the Palladium

first exuberance of war effort is wearing off, and the business of making hay while the sun shines, picking rosebuds while you may, begins in earnest. The call for entertainment started with a rumble from George Bernard Shaw, and was reiterated by Margot, Countess of Oxford and many others.

### Sunday Shows

The theatres of Europe must inevitably undergo change, but not spectacularly. Box-office prices will be lower, censorship more rigorous; but, as yet, the theatre has not become a deliberate propaganda instrument. As a reviewer remarked when "The Importance of Being Earnest" was revived in a London suburb: "Everyone realised the importance of not being earnest."

In London, West End theatres have been opened once more. Permission has been sought to present Sunday shows, which in peace-time would invoke a storm of protest from preservers of the Sabbatical calm. But during the first Great War, such things as woman suffrage and daylight saving were pushed through—the English forget to be conservative in wartime.

### More Jokes

England's comedians have loosened their ties and worked overtime to invent topical gags. The result has been several bright revues. One at the Palladium, crammed with soldiers, sailors and girl friends, has some good touches. Everybody got a laugh from a sign over a box: "40 hommes, 8 chevaux."

Another bright laugh-raiser from the same show is the dropping of "air raid" pamphlets called "Ruthless Rhymes for Little Nastiz" from the roof. They go like this:

*Ribbentrop's at Stalin's beck and call,  
Goebbels, when he's able,  
Likes pretending he's Clark Gable,  
And Goering's got rude pictures on his wall.*

Also featured on the pamphlet is a menu of Reich pudding with anschlaue, Peace Soup, Cooked Goose with Siegfritters.

Such celebrities as Beatrice Lillie and Ivor Novello have mounted the stage to croon the witless, popular Palladium war tune, "Run Rabbit Run." Incidentally, Novello has written a new marching song, "We'll Remember the Meadows." During 1914-18 his "Keep the Home Fires Burning" became a classic among such ditties.

### In Paris

Paris, so gay traditionally, is, as yet, nervous of opening up too many of her theatres. The famed *Comedie Francaise* gives three performances a week, and at the other extreme, the bawdy *Concert Mayol*, a revue after the fashion of the *Folies-Bergere* or *Bal Tabarin* but not so refined, caters to soldiers, *roués* and anyone else interested in lots of chorus girls. As for war songs in Paris, nothing has come to light except something called "Victoire, la fille de Madelon," which was to have been sung by Maurice Chevalier, until it turned out to be what the Americans expressively label a "stinkaroo."

### In Berlin

In Berlin, workers go tieless and collarless from their work-places to see Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare; later they will see Wilde and Shaw, as the Germans say they are too "cultured" to prohibit French and English dramas because of war. Ludwig Diehl, a well-known actor, is at the front. Weiss Ferdly, who for irreverence of Nazis once landed himself in concentration camp at Dachau, still continues to delight Munich audiences. He has a good gag; he raises his arm as if to give the Nazi salute. Then he unexpectedly says: "At Dachau, the snow is that high."

### War Songs

Britain's warriors continue to warble "Roses of Picardy," "There's a Long, Long Trail," and "Pack

Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag," interspersed with such jollity as:

*If the Sergeant drinks your rum, never mind,  
If the Sergeant drinks your rum, never mind,  
He's entitled to his tot,  
But he's drunk the ruddy lot.  
If the Sergeant drinks your rum, never mind.*

In the United States young and old composers have come out of retirement or Tin Pan Alley and have been tunelessly advocating going "Over There" or saying "This Ain't Our War!"

### Pictures

The cinema world has been quick on the job after its first attack of the jitters, and now showing are such films as the newsreel, "The Fight for Peace," "The American Way" and others. Also showing is



NOEL COWARD

He now works for the Admiralty

a French film, "Harvest," which was at first banned by the New York State Board of Motion Picture Censors. The ban was lifted and crowds came, most to be bored, some to be thrilled by a magnificent piece of filmic art. "Time" reports: "... Even the actors seemed to have no special importance when an old stone wall, a tree, a cloud were almost as much a part of the cast, where a big round loaf of peasant bread was a climax. ... Against the backdrop of Europe's war-wrecked villages, this parable of the restoration of a village, the basic unit of Europe's civilisation, through a peasant's labour and love, had some of the primitive Biblical grandeur of the story of Creation. In a French gaol meantime sat the man who wrote the parable, Author Jean Giono—for refusing to obey the mobilisation order."

General forecast: The theatrical world will probably tend toward the light, slap-happy type of entertainment, with meat for the thinking few. For New Zealand: Who knows? Probably the gods and Australian theatrical managers will favour us with a show or two round Christmas and the New Year.