



Published Weekly
REGISTERED G.P.O., WELLINGTON, N.Z., AS A NEWSPAPER.

Vol. II., No. 12.

WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1928.

What Does the Public Want?

IT is absurd, says St. John Ervine in this article, in "The Radio Times," to suppose that the public, as a whole, can ever be in agreement as to what it wants. Tastes differ profoundly. Those who are responsible for providing entertainment should see to it that they give only the best, for the best pays in that it always outlasts the worst. The motto of the listener should be, briefly, "I'll tolerate your tosh, if you'll tolerate mine!"

WHAT does the public want? That is the question which all entertainers have been asking ever since the original Morality piece was performed in the Garden of Eden, and was booed off the stage. Someone has answered it, but not satisfactorily, with the assertion that the public does not know what it wants until it gets it. If that be true—and it is largely true—then the business of entertainment is entirely a matter of luck; and a perfectly good entertainment may be a calamitous failure merely because it happens to be produced at the wrong time. How is one to account for the fact that a clever comedy, "The Road to Rome," should receive so little support from the play-going public that it was withdrawn after a run of a fortnight?

Some critics have ascribed its failure to its title, saying that the public regarded it as (a) a proselytising piece, or (b) a dull, historical piece; while others asserted that the theatre in which the play was produced was too large, or that the preliminary publicity was inadequate, or that the time of year was the wrong time. Any or all of these explanations may be right. I suppose there are idiots in the world who imagine that a play called "The Road to Rome" must be either an awful warning against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church or an attempt to persuade weak Protestants to desert the faith of their fathers. I suppose, too, that there are want-wits who think

that any play which is not about cock-tails must be dull. When Miss Heather Thatcher took a play called "Quest" to Sheffield, a member of her company talked about it to a young person in a hair-dresser's shop in that city. The actress thought she might do some useful propaganda for her play by talking of it to the young person who, after she had listened for a few minutes, exclaimed, "Oh, it isn't a musical comedy, then!" "No," the actress replied, "it's a play!" The young person expressed her disappointment. What she liked was musical comedy. Anyhow, what sort of a play was "Quest"? The actress told her. A cry of pain burst from the young person's lips. "Aren't there any posh clothes in it?" she moaned. "No," the actress answered. "Then I shan't go," the young person said. "Fancy! Not a musical comedy, and no posh clothes in it!" That is the sort of playgoer that grows in Sheffield, and managers can easily make up their minds about the sort of entertainment they must offer that poor fool on whose education hundreds of pounds have obviously been wasted. The woman would have been as well if she had never been educated at all!

I take it that the public want good entertainment, but that it cannot tell what is good entertainment until it has enjoyed it. I know what a good meal it, but I cannot tell whether the meal I am about to eat is good until I have eaten it. The cook has to chance her luck with me, and she may be unfortunate enough to find that I am the single person in the world who cannot eat meals cooked

by her. If she offers me a bowl of Scotch broth—the finest soup in the world—in the middle of July, I am unlikely to thank her for it as heartily as I should do if she offered it to me in the middle of December; and if I am invited to witness a performance of "Ghosts" by the best company in England on a fine afternoon in the merry month of June, I may reply, "Do you know, I think I'll go and gather me nuts and may instead!" There must, I think, be some regard shown for the season and the temper of the time, but not, I suggest, too much regard for them. It will not do to lower the standard when the mood is unexact-ing because there may be difficulty in raising it again; and on the whole it is better to offer the best you have, even if no one wants it, than to offer your worst, because you will find, when the public has become sated with imbecility, that you will not easily be able to improve upon it. When the taste has been ruined, people do not turn from bad stuff to good stuff; they turn to different stuff; and if managers of theatres persist in supplying "dud" entertainments, a time will inevitably come when the very people who demanded them will cease to ask for them. When it comes, they will not say, "Give us good stuff!" They will conclude that you have nothing but bad stuff to sell, and will seek for their entertainment in other places than yours. And what is true of the theatre-managers is true of all other entertainers.

Periodically I read letters in the newspapers from people, generally anonymous, complaining of the B.B.C. programmes. These complaints amount to this: I do not like classical music (or concert parties or talks, or dance music, or whatever it may be), so why should there be any classical music in the programmes?

—(Continued on page 4.)