

A Corpse Is Revived



The Author's Point of View On the Little Theatre Concern About Play Production Fees

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by

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THERE are, it is commonly said, two sides to every argument, and now, from a reliable source, comes the other side of "Jack Daw's" story, "Tragedy in One Act," which recently appeared in the "Record." "Jack Daw" predicted, more or less, the extinction of the Little Theatre movement in New Zealand on account of excessive royalty demands for rights to produce plays.

There appear to be no grounds for considering this extinction at all likely.

There has, unquestionably, been a good deal of discussion in amateur dramatic circles about authors' royalties, and a good deal of misleading information has been bruited abroad. As a result, many societies seem to be under serious misapprehension. In contrast, this article will outline the attitude of the largest firm of authors' agents, Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd.

It must be remembered that plays are the property of the various authors who, naturally, may do what they will with that property. This property—the copyright, in other words—is their source of income. A playwright expects his remuneration from royalties—amateur just as much as professional.

Put bluntly, the drama is a commercial proposition so far as the dramatist is concerned. So his copyright is marketed by him to obtain the best possible return. He endeavours, of course, to see that amateur drama is kept alive—so long as it does not become merely a non-paying parasite.

Both morally and legally, the play belongs to the author and he alone can decide what will be done with it. Naturally, he wishes it performed—at a fee; also naturally he must not make that fee so high that it will deprive him of a source of income. It is the law of supply and demand again. If fees are prohibitive, they will certainly be reduced. That is French's practice. When a play fails to draw when first released for amateurs at the usual fee of £5/5/-, or when a once-popular play becomes a little older, reduction in fee follows, until eventually a "bargain basement" price of £2/2/- is reached.

Since October 1 last year, seventy-one plays have been reduced from £5/5/- to £3/3/-, including such successes as "After All," "Behold, We Live," "Children in Uniform," "There's Always Juliet." Many others, such as "Brown Sugar," "The Improper Duchess," and "Mary Stuart" have been reduced since the same date from three to two guineas.

The author must, and does, adjust his fee so that it will not kill, or even injure, the amateur theatre. Large societies can, and do, pay the top fee for the most recent plays. So do many smaller societies—those that cannot always choose from the very wide selection of cheaper plays

ferent from conditions elsewhere: settlement is so sparse and so much of the population lives in small country districts. These are given as reasons for the reduction of fees. Similarly, it has been argued that smaller towns should pay less than large towns.

Conditions in New Zealand are *not* greatly different from conditions elsewhere. In many parts of the British Isles, in Australia and in Canada, our own conditions of population are reproduced. Furthermore, it is interesting that amateur dramatic activity is everywhere much more pronounced in smaller centres than it is in larger ones.

With a population of eight to ten millions, London has comparatively little in the way of amateur drama.

As for the argument that smaller centres should pay less, it must be pointed out that the fee is charged per performance: obviously it is useless performing a play unless there is prospect of getting one decent-sized audience at least. It would be ridiculous for any society to perform more plays than they could get audiences. Conversely, even in London, more cannot be crowded into a theatre than it will seat. The same applies to Dunedin, Invercargill or Tautapeke.

Royalties are universally paid in respect of each performance: a theatre or hall is only a theatre or hall be it in London or Levin. As for size—it often is smaller in a large city than in a small town.



THE charges made by French's are briefly given here. Performances of full-length plays cost two to five guineas, according to tariff. Sometimes there is

a reduction of a guinea for subsequent consecutive performances in the same hall, or there may be reductions for performances in a small hall. There is no fixed fee for all plays. This depends, naturally, on play and on author.

For one-act plays, fees vary considerably, ranging from 5/- to £2/2/-. Half a guinea is a fair average. Plays in great demand usually run out at 15/- to £1/1/-. Higher fees than one guinea are rare. No reductions are made for repeated performances or the use of small halls.

The position is somewhat more complicated when it comes to reading. French's define a reading as a performance, and reasonably so. In order to defeat attempts at evasion, "Charge for admission" includes any charge made for programmes, for supper or any other form of valuable consideration in connection with the performance.

Bearing this in mind, it may be stated that for readings where not more than 50 persons are present in the audience (which may consist of members, or members and guests), and where no charge is made for admission, there is no fee. For readings in excess of that number, or for which a charge is made, there is a set fee of £1/1/- for three-act plays, and 7/6 for one-act plays. (Cont. on page 37.)

A THOUGHTLESS and rather unintelligent contention has been raised that conditions in New Zealand are dif-