

There has been much said by dramatic critics but little said for them. However, careful research has disclosed that this timid group is not without a champion. The Supreme Court of Iowa has had occasion to give much needed courage to these diffident disciples of the drama. The case decided by that august group also affords a classic example of how first night audiences should disport themselves.

John Walker
It came to pass that Billy Hamilton of Des Moines, sometimes editor, reporter and dramatic critic of one of the local sheets, hied himself, together with friend wife, to the Des Moines premiere of the Cherry Sisters. The sisters admitted that they could sing and dance and give recitations; in short, render - perchance from wing to wing - any phase of the drama from grinning comedy to the grimmest tragedy.

One can visualize the lights of the old opera house slowly wink^{ing} out, the hush of the expectant audience broken only by the genteel snuffles of mingled emotion and hay fever. The curtain creaks upward, removing from the contemplation of the audience the magic of its legend, 'Asbestos!' The sisters Cherry romp onto the stage. On with the show! Billy Hamilton - tonight in the role of dramatic critic - mutely absorbs the wonders of this even-

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ing. He comes away, ere the tumult and the shouting dies. There is work to be done. Billy toils far into the night on the review of the performance of the Cherry sisters. His is a labor of love.

It seems that the sisters Cherry were mildly distressed by Billy's comment. They brought a libel suit against Billy and various of the newspapers that had printed his review. Billy, et al., adroitly countered by pleading, in substance, that no harm was meant; that Billy was incapable of harboring a malicious thought. Billy, in that shy, halting manner so common to dramatic critics, had written the following ^{review} ~~"insinuation"~~ complained of by the sisters:

"Effie is an old jade of 50 summers, Jessie a frisky filly of 40, and Addie, the flower of the family, a capering monstrosity of 35. Their long skinny arms, equipped with talons at the extremities, swung mechanically, and anon waved frantically at the suffering audience. The mouths of their rancid features opened like caverns, and sounds like the wailing of damned souls issued therefrom. They pranced around the stage with a motion that suggested a cross between the danse du ventre and fox trot, - strange creatures with painted faces and hideous mien. Effie is spavined, Addie is stringhalt, and Jessie, the only one who showed her stockings, has legs with calves as classic in their outlines as the curves of a broom handle."

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At the trial the sisters rose nobly to the defense of the drama. It was manifest that they considered its future to be at stake and themselves three sensitive souls wallowing in an abyss of artistic ignorance and misunderstanding. Effie bore the brunt for the sisters. Being the eldest and presumably better qualified to give a more mature account of their activities, she took the witness stand. Freely interspersing her testimony with pantomime she said, among a number of other things, "These entertainments are concert-literary entertainments. I don't sing much. I have recitations and readings...in costume...I recite essays and events that have happened."

With pardonable pride she touched on the sources of their material. "I have written up my own. One is, 'The Modern Young Man;' the other, 'An Event that Happened in the City of Chicago.' I sing an Irish song,- an Irish ballad; also an eulogy on ourselves. It is ^a kind of a ballad composed by ourselves. I help the others sing it. I have forgotten it. It is about an editor. In the chorus I walked a little around the stage,- kind of a fast walk."

Old Madrid was not neglected: "A cavalier is a Spaniard, I believe. I represent a Spaniard. That is given in the act that we call 'The Gypsy's Warning.'" Effie then moved lightly to another skit. "I wear my bicycle bloomer rig....in the chorus I walked a little around the stage,- kind of a fast walk or a little run."

Referring to the singing of Ben Bolt by her little sister, Effie continued, "I would come in and hypnotize her in a farce way...while she would sing..My little sister was barefooted in one act,- in very long dresses to her ankles...She also appears in a long robe in a tableau

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clinging to the cross."

A peek at the birth of the theme song is given. It seems that as the curtain was about to ring down, the sisters Cherry would gather in a flushed and triumphant cluster near the wings and sing these words, "Cherries red and cherries ripe, the cherries they are out of sight, cherries ripe and cherries red, Cherry Sisters still ahead."

Billy Hamilton ^{was} ~~is~~ undismayed by the sentimental note upon which Effie concludes her testimony. Nor is the vividness of his impressions blurred by the trial. He takes the witness stand and upholds the banner of the press. Here are some of the more charitable of his contributions: "It was the most ridiculous performance I ever saw. There was no orchestra...The pianist left after the thing was half over. She could not stand the racket...There was no other music, except vocal music from the Cherry's. They had a drum, and I think they had cymbals...They read essays and sung choruses and gave recitations, interspersed with the remarks that, if the boys did'nt stop, the curtain would go down."

The scene was not without its touches of unconcious pathos, though the melancholy days had not yet come. Billy, in his pre-Volsted testimony, was able to regale the court further. "One young man brought a pair of beer bottles which he used as a pair of glasses. They threatened to stop the performance unless he was put out, but he was not put out, and they did'nt stop." ~~Beer bottles!~~
~~Nostalgia stalks!~~

Evidently this was not the first experience of the sisters with the press, for Billy continued, "Then there was

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a song, 'I want to be an editor.'...The song was so jumbled up one could hardly make anything out of it except, 'I want to be an editor, I want to be an editor' whereupon the audience rose as one man and called on me to stand up. I did not stand up." Billy added as an evident afterthought, "My wife was there."

The high flower of the performance was reached "When Jessie was on the stage..." It was at this point that the audience gave to the world a pattern for theatre etiquette that will undoubtedly henceforth have a tremendous vogue. That astute gathering proved to be critical even of cuticle, for Billy says, "Jessie...appeared in the Trilby act in bare feet and short dresses. She was asked to trim her toe nails..." How did Jessie react to this beautiful suggestion? "She appeared more pleased than anything else."

The trial court, after this dramatic interlude, found in Billy's favor. The Cherry sisters carried the cause of the drama to the Supreme Court of Iowa. One may be naturally curious to learn who was ultimately chosen by that learned group. Alas for art! The Cherrys were not picked! *

JUDGMENT AFFIRMED.

- End -

*CHERRY -vs- DES MOINES LEADER, et al., 114 Iowa Reports 298.

47 N.W.