

INSTITUTE FOR ALL

New York's Popular Movement for Education.

HIGH ENTERTAINMENT CHEAP

High Entertainment, Cheap Religious, Political, Intellectual Progress Among the Poorer Classes On a Basis of Least Cost to All Concerned.

NEW YORK, February 9, 1907.—Social evolution in the shape of dramatic entertainment at popular prices, or, in other words, the education and elevation of the masses by means of the theatre, is the purpose of a movement now well established in this city and soon, it is planned, to be introduced in a general way throughout the country through local committees working in unison with the central committees here.

Thus far, in this city, the idea has been extraordinarily successful, and the theatre managers, on the whole, have welcomed it no less enthusiastically than the people who heretofore, for want of capital to invest in a first-class show, have been obliged to stay at home or else to indulge in the dubious delights of "Queen of Chinatown," "King of the Moonshiners," and other East Side apologies for a play.

Actually the movement has revealed a popular passion for Shakespeare. The proof of this lies in the fact that the most successful period so far was the week, not long ago, during which Robert Mantell appeared in Shakespearean roles at one of the local theatres. No less than 3500 tickets were sold through the dramatic department of the People's Institute, which is the organization behind the movement, and 1,000 of these tickets were for the last night alone.

It used to be said of New York theatres that they would close their doors but for the pleasure-loving Hebrews. Such a condition no longer exists. As a matter of fact, the managing director of the People's Institute, Charles Sprague Smith, is of the opinion that a theatre offering a clean entertainment at popular prices cannot have too many seats. More surprising things than a popular passion for the classic drama have developed. Only the other night, at the rooms of the People's Institute Club A, in the heart of the East Side, Mr. Smith, who was formerly professor of modern languages at Columbia University, found an audience made up chiefly of working girls eager to hear him discuss the question whether Homer was a man or a myth and whether the Minoan Thales really did much for

It was, furthermore, through co-operation with the People's Institute that symphony concerts at 25 cents a season ticket—at the rate of four and one-sixth cents a concert—have been offered to people who, except when at church, had, perhaps never heard anything but a barrel organ or a German band. If the Institute had a house or auditorium of its own, with 3,000 seats, the place would be filled every Sunday night, in Mr. Smith's opinion.

Last year this popular theatre movement, drew 10,000 people, many of whom had never been inside a Broadway playhouse before, to see Maud Adams in "Peter Pan," and at present it is drawing hundreds of East Siders nightly to one of the new American dramas. In two weeks, recently, it caused the sale of 3,500 seats at the theatre where for two weeks George Bernard Shaw's satirical "Caesar and Cleopatra" was being performed; it sent 5,000 people in seven weeks to see the drama made out of Lew Wallace's "Prince of India," 3,000 more in two weeks to see a revival of Shakespeares rarely performed "Cymbeline," and PEOPLES INSTITUTE 2000 in the course of eight days to see a presentation of "Midsummer Night's Dream." The same movement lately afforded some 600 high school pupils an opportunity to attend matinee performances of Browning's "Pippa Passes." This new movement, in some instances, has actually been responsible for the success of a play.

In all but the theatres that cater especially to the social warriors, the People's Institute element is becoming

larger week by week, much to the relief of managers who have been taking chances with dramas of the simple life.

A few years ago, when Beerbohm Tree, the English tragedian, was making his first and only visit to the United States, he proposed giving some performances of "Hamlet," but the theatre manager, fearing rows of vacant seats, flatly refused the proposal. But now, since the People's Institute has brought the purveyors of the drama and the once neglected "common people" together, Shakespeare is no longer a scarecrow, and any theatre manager in the city would be prepared to consider the production of one of the old classics tomorrow if the modern show at present on the boards of his theatre should prove a failure.

The movement so far has been limited in its extent, but now that it is successful beyond doubt or peradventure, it will be extended to include not only the public schools, but also labor organizations, church societies, and department stores. A general committee, of influential membership has been formed, it is planned to extend the movement to other cities. It is all a part of Director Sprague Smith's system, outlined when he founded the People's Institute ten years ago, of helping his fellow men by bringing them together in assemblies of all kinds, political, religious and intellectual, and giving them an opportunity to better their relations with one another.

The Institute represents not revolution, but evolution. Its platform reads as follows: "The People's Institute, recognizing fraternity as the fundamental social truth, democracy as the highest known form of human government, and national worth as dependent upon individual worth, seeks to promote, through education and the cooperation of good men of all conditions and occupations, the peaceful evolution of a society based upon the recognition of the interdependence of man with man." It welcomes the socialist as a type of evolutionist, though not stamping the seal of approval upon all he says, but it bars the anarchist. Its work has already spread beyond the city in the shape of people's forums. One offshoot has been established as far West as Portland, Oregon.

What the director hopes to have one day is a big fine room for the Institute, with club rooms and class rooms and an auditorium with a seating capacity large enough to accommodate the crowds that attend the Cooper Union meetings. In its broad educational work the Institute has the active support of the public school authorities; in its religious work, the support of the many leading clergymen of many creeds, and in its civic activities the support of public spirited men in general, including Governor Hughes.

The Institute started with nothing; it received \$300 in contributions the first year, and at that time this new brotherhood of man idea seemed doomed to pass away; but last year, although the expenses of the Institute were \$14,500, only a debt of about \$500 was incurred. The late Abram S. Hewitt was one of those who helped Professor Smith in the beginning. He it was who invited the founder and his friends to use his house as a meeting place, and he also gave the free use of the large hall of Cooper Union for the experimental course of lectures and discussions. Samuel Gompers, of the American Federation of Labor, has also lent a helping hand since the first days, doing much personally, besides securing the support of organized labor in general.

The Institute is dependent, to a great extent, upon the annual subscriptions of its friends, and will grow, of course, in proportion to their growth. It caters to every wholesome desire. Its non-sectarian religious meetings at the Cooper Union Sunday nights are remarkable for the fact that they attract crowds of people who have practically abandoned the established churches; and ninety-five per cent of these large congregations are men. The Institute has successfully undertaken many projects for civic improvement, and it has wielded a powerful influence not only locally but at Albany in regard to legislation affecting the people's rights. Likewise it has promoted civic and social righteousness by means of clubs for the young as well as for adults.

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