

THE PATHETIC SIDE OF VAUDEVILLE

BERT LEVY, NOTED CARTOONIST AND ENTERTAINER DESCRIBES IN WORDS AND SKETCHES THE TEARY ASPECTS OF A LAUGHING PROFESSION



"STRANDED." To the dog—"Geel! Trixie, it's a long walk to dear old Broadway."



BERT LEVY



"ROASTED." Next morning's papers.



"CLOSED." The manager has just sent a note to say that his act is bad and that he had better quit.



"Many the time I'VE brought down the old house."

BERT LEVY, the popular cartoonist of the New York Morning Telegraph, has become famous throughout the United States by his cartoons of vaudeville life, which have appeared every Sunday for the last two years. His work has been quoted and reprinted oftener than the work of any other New York newspaper artist. This, in addition to the fact that his personality is familiar to the theatergoers of over sixty cities in America, has given him an enviable vogue in this country.

Bert Levy is a Jew, an intense lover of the art and traditions of his race, and his ambition in life is to leave behind him some record of this aspect of his nature. His illustrations for Ezra Brudus' "The Fugitive," which he executed for The Call some two years ago, was his first work on American soil and gave Eastern editors some idea of the power and depth of feeling his work conveys. By birth Bert Levy is an Australian. To use the artist's own words:

"I never did any work of much importance in my native land, for I could not make myself understood there; in a word, there was not scope for my secret ambition, which was to illustrate the pathetic and serious side of my race. All I did out there was to draw libels on my coreligionists—alleged humorous jokes on Jews for the Sydney Bulletin. I was also the artist of The Leader, the weekly journal of the powerful Melbourne Age.

"All this time I was nursing my ambition to do good work, so I studied quietly and persistently, and when I exhibited my serious studies to the prominent Jews of New York, well—I'm grateful to America for the kind way in which it has received me. Oscar Straus, Jacob Schiff, Jacob Adler and many other great and prominent Jews have encouraged me to continue my work and lectures on Jewish art and affairs. I have now spoken from the pulpit of over thirty synagogues and no words can express my gratitude for the kindness shown me by the different rabbis and congregations."

By Bert Levy

THE average stomach, well rested and with its stomach lined with good, warm, wholesome food, sits in judgment upon the performance on the first day of each week. It leans back in comfortable, soft chairs and faces the stage with an antagonistic "well-you've-got-to-show-me" air that chills the enterprising vaudevillian to the bone.

During my travels hundreds of men and women in private life have said to me: "I'm thinking of going into vaudeville; it seems an easy way of making money, and such a nice life, too!" I wish I could adequately describe to vaudeville aspirants the atmosphere of the stage during the first performance of a new bill.

Oh, that array of unfriendly faces that lines the wings to "look over the new act." Some one has said that the performer's most difficult audience is made up of the people of his own kind. Martin Beck, the manager of the Orpheum circuit, evidently thinks this is true, or he would not have signed the set of rules hanging in each dressing-room, one of which reads: "Performers are requested to stay in their dressing-rooms until called for the act, as artists are naturally nervous if watched from the wings by fellow-performers."

The performer who has been in the business twenty years or more is just as easily hurt by the unfriendly criticism of "profes" or the fumes or stage hands as he was when he put in his first week at the business.

One of the first and most essential things the vaudeville aspirant should learn is to tear from his heart the last shred of sentiment and to substitute in its place a determination to absorb and become an integral part of that atmosphere which goes to make up a new and strange life. A refined man or woman of sensitive feelings will lead an unhappy life among "two-a-day" folk until he learns that life is one big vaudeville show, and that nothing matters. Happiness comes only when he has ceased to worry over his place on the bill, but it is only after long years that the intelligent performer drags the demon of petty jealousy from his soul and is content just to "make good."

I myself have been only sixty weeks in vaudeville, and yet I long dozens of times a week to hurry miles away from the "show shop," out on the hills or among the big trees, where the small disputes as to the locations of dressing-rooms, the place on the bill and the hundred and one other trifles that worry "two-a-day" folk may seem like myths. The best antidote to the opinion of the stage hands about the demerits of one's act is a spring morning down by the seashore, where every breaker seems to be roaring, "Oh, forget it!"

But the audience? Does it ever stop to think about the pathetic side of the artist's life in vaudeville? Does it realize that while it is sleeping the performer is speeding hundreds—thousands—of miles from the north, south, east and west to be on time to entertain it? Does it realize that the frail young girl who looks so attractive in her fresh makeup has been sitting in a chair all night and has reached the theater just half an hour before she smilingly dashes on to sing "He's a Cousin of Mine," or "Somewhere the Sun is Shining"? Should that frail young thing show any evidences of fatigue, or, in theater phrase, should she fail to "make good," the audience would never forgive nor forget her.

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