

Chapter VII: The Conventions and the Box Office

Many attempts have been made to sidetrack the conventions, but as a rule without success. You can kid the orchestra section for a while, as there are always suckers without brains; but you can't kid the gallery. The pairs in the \$5.50 seats hate to admit that they can't see through it, and the play will run till the supply of suckers is exhausted.

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The Gad-Fly was one of the first attempts to uproot the conventions. It was an anti-Catholic play, with the sympathy of the materialists. It had lots of money, and was put on by a splendid company. Not a critic had a good word for it, and it lived for only two weeks. The authoress of the novel gave as the reason for its failure that the dramatist had not transferred all the "sincerity" of the original.

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James A. Hearn, once a Catholic, thought that the agnostic ~~world~~ should have a show on the state, so he put on Shore Acres. It was a beautiful play and a great success, but it had to be changed before it run long, because ~~the~~ villain was receiving all the sympathy of the audience.

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A dozen years ago Joseph Medill Patterson, with all the strength of the Chicago Tribune behind him, put on Rebellion, a sordid play, which attacked the position of the Catholic Church on divorce. The drunken husband beat his wife on the state; he is a general low-down character; the baby dies; and the martyred wife becomes a grass widow long enough to marry the noble shiek before the curtain falls on their "ever after!" Rebellion managed to pull through six weeks with its heavy financial backing.

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Wm. Anthony Maguire, who had attracted the attention of David Belasco with a modest play The Walls of Wall Street (produced in South Bend with Alan Dwan in the lead while Maguire was a student at Notre Dame), went to Paterson and thanked him for making his fortune. Within three months his play The Divorce was ready. It went to the catechism for its answer to Rebellion. "The trouble with your book," says the priest in the play, "is that it did not let the child live." The two children live in Maguire's play; and the son murders the white slaver who has sold his sister. Eighteen years after their "happy divorce" the parents learn why Christ said, "What God has joined together let no man put asunder."

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After a dozen years Maguire's play is still going strong on outside circuits, and has a record for tears excelled only by Uncle Tom's Cabin. And Maguire is still going strong. He has averaged one success a year since that time. Six Cylinder Love was the last big one. Every one of his plays can be found in the Book of Proverbs.

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Patterson's failure resulted in his conversion to the Catholic Church.