

The Art of Modern Necromancy

(By BION H. BUTLER)

THE opening of the Pinehurst theater was an event in the Sandhills. The crowd could not be accommodated, and many were turned away, although room for almost eight hundred people had been provided. Seats were in demand as soon as the tickets were on sale, and everything was sold out long in advance of the play.

This is not such an unusual thing, for many other theaters have sold out the house. But never in my recollection have I known a theater of this character in a village remote from centers of population, to sell out a house as big as this with the same type of attraction, and to an audience of the substantial quality as this. Forty years ago in a lumber town in Pennsylvania a wealthy mill man built in the third story of a large brick structure a right complete theater. It was in the air, and the state later condemned it as dangerous, but when it was opened Lawrence Barrett was the star who dedicated the institution. Jefferson, Lotta, Minnie Maddern before she became Minnie Maddern Fiske, and others of that grade, were among the attractions, but the patrons of the house were unique. We came to the theater in top boots and mackinaws, woodsmen with spikes in their heels, town folks with their long tailed coats, and the crowd told Barrett that his Richelieu was no good, and one night guyed Roland Reed because his humor was not full enough of ginger. After the show was over it was learned that when he went on the stage he just heard of the death of one of his family, and the remorse that followed that crowd was acute. Roland Reed came that way a couple of times again before the theater was discontinued and a properly conscious people would laugh if he had recited a threnody on the death of the most prominent citizen of the town, so intent were they on making amends for their previous offense.

But here is a magnificent theater, out in the country, yet filled with an audience of the highest character, with equipment of the most modern kind, one of the best moving picture outfits obtainable, one of the best pipe organs in the South, the building a fine example of the architect's skill and the builder's work, the furnishing of the house immaculate all the way through, and the program covering a variety that included almost everything, and put on by masters, in every line. The living fashion plate, the organ recital, the picture show, the solos, the whole bill, handled by those capable of a place before any audience, and with the audience including a fair proportion of spectators who are familiar with the best that is presented on any American stage.

Well, it was not from the theatrical viewpoint that the thing impressed me, but rather on the basis that here in the Sandhills, miles away from any populous community, the people have access to the best that is to be found any place. The world is getting mighty small under the influences of modern necromancy. In my house is a boy now grown to above six feet who used to pester the life out of me in the effort to work me for a story before he would go to bed as his mother told him to do. And I had a few features that gave some novelty to the stories that served. One of them was a distance compressor, by means of which we moved New York up to the side of San Francisco, and set the moon over on the lot alongside of the house across the road any time it was desired, and in that way we could flit about from place to place without much effort, for we simply moved the place up to the horse block and got on. That scheme sounded novel then. But the railroad and the automobile, and the telephone and the radio, and various other agencies have compressed distance now to where anybody can go any place just by sitting still and letting any place come up. Last night I heard a negro quartette sing at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and by turning a knob a little a man was talking to a banker's gathering in Boston. Distance compressed by the radio,

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