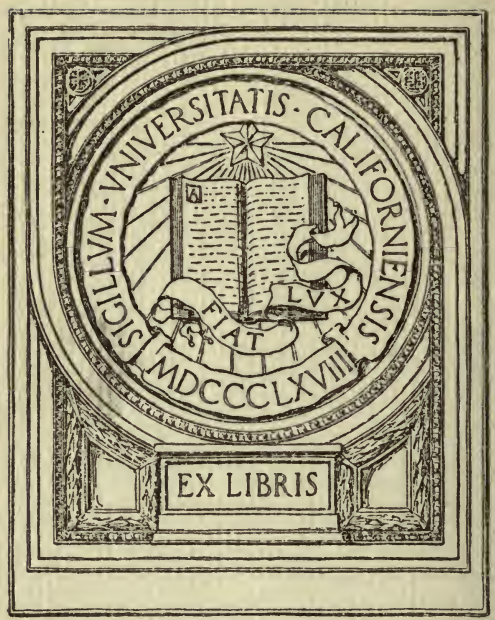
SEEN ON THE STAGE

CLAYTON HAMILTON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SEEN ON THE STAGE

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BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON

Member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1920

TO

Henry Arthur Jones

WITH CRITICAL RESPECT
AND PERSONAL AFFECTION

PREFACE

The papers assembled in the present volume have been previously printed, in earlier versions, in *Vogue* and *The Bookman;* and to the proprietors of these publications I am indebted for the privilege of quoting from my contributions to their pages. In re-editing the large mass of my comments on the current theatre from the autumn of 1917 to the spring of 1920, I have decided to reprint only those articles which happened to deal with topics of abiding importance, and to cast into the discard the many other articles that dealt with matters that were merely timely. This book does not pretend to any unity, except in so far as a certain sort of unity may be suggested by an honest record of the reactions of a single mind to a multitude of multifarious phenomena. The present volume may be considered, quite informally, as a sort of suffix to *The Theory of the Theatre, Studies in Stagecraft,* and *Problems of the Playwright;* and I should prefer that it might, if possible, be read in association with its predecessors in the series.

C. H.

New York City: 1920.

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SEEN ON THE STAGE

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I

LIFE AND THE THEATRE

The quickest answer to the question, "What is the purpose of art?" would come with the retort courteous, "What is the purpose of life?" for both aims are indeed identical, since art is nothing else than the quintessence of life.

The purpose of life has been discussed ever since the human race became articulate; and an adequate review of this discussion would require a *résumé* of all the great religions of the world. Without attempting to cover so colossal a subject in an unpretentious essay, the present writer asks permission to offer an opinion concerning what appear to him to be the noblest and the meanest answers to this all-important question.

The most ignoble definition of the purpose of life was formulated, in fairly recent times, by the Puritans of England and the Calvinists of Scotland. According to the concept of these dour, sour, glowering religionists, this world is nothing but a vale of tears, through which a man should slink whining, like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs, in the hope of being caught up subsequently into a nobler and a better life which

shall offer to him a renewal of those opportunities for positive appreciation which, on principle, he had neglected throughout the pitiful and wasted period of his sojourn upon earth. The Puritans and Calvinists warned their devotees against the lure of beauty, and branded it as an ensnarement of the devil; and, by this token, they are damned, if there is such a sentence as damnation in the supreme court of everlasting law.

The noblest answer to the basic question, "What is the purpose of life?," was asseverated by the noblest men who ever lived,— those great Athenians who crowned this earth with their Acropolis, two thousand and four hundred years ago. These men asserted that our world should be regarded as a valley of soul-making,— a sort of training-camp for infinite futurity, in which the individual should find an opportunity to indicate his worthiness to live, by accepting every offered chance to prove himself alive.

That lovely and lasting phrase, "the valley of soul-making," was not invented by the ancient Greeks: it was formulated by John Keats, who is their true apostle to all modern nations, and, because of that, the greatest poet of recent centuries. It was Keats, also, who was destined to remind a forgetful world that "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," and that both of these ideals are identical with the ideal of Righteousness. There is one God, in three aspects: — Beauty, which appeals to the emotions; Truth, which appeals to the intellect; Righteousness, which appeals to the conscience. This is the Gospel according to John Keats: this is the Law and the Prophets.

If this world — according to the ancient Greeks — is to be regarded as a valley of soul-making, and if — according to the apostolic vision of John Keats — there is no basic difference between Beauty, Truth, and Righteousness, it becomes the duty of every transient visitor to this valley to develop, in the little time allotted to him, what Rudyard Kipling has described as "the makin's of a bloomin' soul," by keeping his spirit at all moments responsive and awake to every drifting evidence of what is True or Beautiful or Right.

If the purpose of life is to prove ourselves alive, in order to indicate our fitness for continuing to live in some hypothetical domain where second chances are accorded in the future, it behooves us to live as intensely and convincingly as possible throughout that fleeting period of three score years and ten which is allotted to us, on the average, in this immediate valley of soul-making.

It is only at infrequent intervals throughout our period of living that the best of us is able to feel himself to be alive. Sir Thomas Browne has penned an eloquent comment on this fact, in the concluding section of his famous *Letter to a Friend*, in which he says, —"And surely if we deduct all those days of our life which we might wish unlived, and which abate the comfort of those we now live; if we reckon up only those days which God hath accepted of our lives, a life of good years will hardly be a span long." There is also, in the record of eternal literature, a comparatively recent poem by John Masefield, called *Biography*,

in which the poet, bemoaning the ironic chance that many inconsiderable days in his experience may be reduced by his biographer "to lists of dates and facts," celebrates with lyric eloquence the unrecorded dates of several magnificent impressions and expressions of the soul which would escape the merely secondary apperceptiveness of any scholarly investigator.

The purpose of life appears to be to live while yet we may — as the poet Tasso told us, in one of the most forlorn and lovely passages of lyric literature,— to seize every fleeting opportunity for feeling and asserting that we are alive, in order to indicate our fitness for continuing to live in some hypothetic future region, "beyond the loom of the last lone star through open darkness hurled." Immortality, in order to be won, should be deserved; and no man is worthy of eternal life unless he has accepted every chance for living that has been offered to him in his transitory progress throughout this difficult but dreamful valley of soul-making.

We feel ourselves to be alive only at those divided and ecstatic moments when we overwhelmingly become aware of the identity of Beauty, Truth, and Righteousness, and thereby undergo an instant flash of cosmic consciousness. It is evermore our purpose to repeat these moments. We desire ardently to prove ourselves to be alive. Many of us follow false allurements — drink or drugs, religion or the unspontaneous and manufactured fire of simulated love; but if such mortals fail in their pursuit, their failure should be written down to inexperience and not necessarily to conscious

abnegation of a floating and far-off ideal. "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty"; and this axiom is so augustly sound that it is nobler to faint and fall in the pursuit of some *ignis fatuus* of truth or beauty than to slink through all experience reservèdly, like a cringing cur with tail between the legs.

In the experience of the average man — whose acuteness of perception in the intellectual, emotional, or moral sphere is merely ordinary — the actuality of living offers only infrequent and wistful opportunities for life. For this reason, he is required to rely on art to present to him those opportunities for life that he has missed. Art extracts the quintessence of life, and serves it up freely to millions of men who, because of their own dullness, have not been able to extract it for themselves. Art offers, to the average man, the only royal road to an appreciation of all the wonders of this valley of soul-making, and affords him the only available opportunity to experience the sense of life vicariously.

This, then, is the excuse for art, and the answer to any theoretic question that seeks to probe its purpose: — the aim of art is to provide a sense of life for men who, in themselves, are not sufficiently alive to create art by their very living.

We may come now — as a corollary of this thesis — to consider the proper function of the theatre. The theatre exists — in theory — as an institution which promises to provide the ordinary man with a keen impression of life, in exchange for two dollars of money and two hours of time. The theatre promises the

public a more instant and intense sensation of the miracle of life than is usually offered in a month of living. The average man has only a few years in which to live — in this valley of soul-making; and if he can save a day, a week, or possibly a month, by going to the theatre, he is more than willing to follow the allurement of this royal road. But in response to this fidelity, which can only be regarded as idealistic, the theatre incurs and is required to assume the duty of offering to the average man the promised taste of life.

There are two ways in which the theatre can furnish to the public a vicarious experience of life: first, by imitation, and, second, by suggestion. The first method is employed by the realists, and the second method is employed by the romantics. This is not a time to argue concerning the respective merits of these two contrasted methods: it is sufficient, in the present context, to state that neither method can succeed in practice unless it shall convince the public that the two hours required for the traffic of the stage have been spent more profitably in the theatre than they might have been spent elsewhere.

The average spectator — disappointed, for the moment, by his individual experience of living at large — attends the theatre in the hope of quickening his consciousness of life. He wants the play to happen not so much upon the stage as in himself. He goes to the theatre — quite literally — to enjoy himself: — that is to say,— his own contributive response of emotion and of thought. The play must happen *to him;* or

else, by his judgment, the play must be dismissed as a failure. He is seeking an opportunity to live and to feel himself alive; and, if this opportunity is not accorded to him, he will warn his friends away from the production that he has attended.

For this reason, a realistic play that invites the quick response of recognition for facts that have been faithfully observed must carry out the letter of its contract; and a romantic play, which pretends, without reliance on admitted and accepted facts, to suggest some evident, irrefutable law of nature, must also convince the members of the audience that they have really witnessed vicariously a vision of life itself, as life is generally understood.

Nothing, in the theatre, can ever be successful unless it offers some vicarious experience of life. The best-made play will fail unless it affords some suggestion of life that is more potent than its emphasis on mechanism. The popularity of actresses and actors is measured by the extent of their ability to seem alive. This ability, in many cases, may result from training and experience; in many other cases, it may result more directly from that inexplicable power which is commonly described as "personality." Life is what the public seeks, in going to the theatre; and the appearance, or else the illusion, of life is what it welcomes and rewards in those who exert themselves behind the footlights.

II

PERSONAL GREATNESS ON THE STAGE

Sir Harry Lauder

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote a noble essay on the *Uses of Great Men;* but, in this disquisition, he neglected to discuss the simplest and the subtlest service that is rendered by great people to the ordinary public. "He is great," said Emerson, "who is what he is from nature, and who never reminds us of others"; and again, "Every one can do his best thing easiest": but the philosopher omitted the important point that any one who does his best thing easily, without reminding us of others, seems always more alive than the common herd of humankind.

Great men are more alive than others; and this is the token of their greatness. Furthermore, the liveliness — to call it so — that tingles in them is a central and creative source of energy that radiates an influence electrical through all of the environing ether. Nothing can be dark that sits unshadowed in the sun; and no human being can be dull when he comes into contact with a super-man. Of any personage who does supremely and superbly anything that ordinary people find it difficult to do, it may be said, in the Biblical phrase, that "a virtue goes out of him." Because he feels himself to be alive, he communicates un-

consciously a sense of life to many other people who seemed dead before he walked among them.

Great men can never be mistaken or ignored. "By their works ye shall know them," if it be possible to watch them at their work, or to study — after many years or centuries — their easily accomplished products: but, otherwise, it is always possible to recognize them by their very presence. Something clutches at your throat and squeezes tears into your eyes. It is a recorded fact of history that one day, when Abraham Lincoln was gazing out of a window of the White House, he turned suddenly to Secretary Stanton and said, "There goes a man!" His eyes had been attracted by a casual pedestrian that he had never seen before. This man was Walt Whitman,— the greatest American, with the single exception of Lincoln himself, that has ever yet been born.

The thing to be admired among men is greatness; and, wherever greatness undeniably exists, there is no time to quarrel about minor questions of degree or quality. Whoever can do any tiny thing, however trivial, more perfectly than any other person in the world is admitted, by this token, to the fraternity of greatness. Nearly twenty years ago it was my privilege to meet a bootblack in Detroit whose name I never asked but whose eyes I shall never forget. My shoes were very shabby as I mounted his throne; for they had not been shined since I had left New York. He went to work upon them with a will: and, when he had finished, "Can they do that better in the east?" he asked, and, "No!" I answered. "That's because I put my

soul into it," he said. This was an Italian boy, with a face like those that Ghirlandaio loved to paint, many centuries ago, in Florence; and he will never see this printed paragraph that celebrates his glory; but he made me feel alive, one little moment, nearly twenty years ago; and I wish, now, that I knew his name.

Whatever sits in moonlight is lighted by the moon and silvered into poetry; and whoever comes into contact with a super-person is tingled, for the moment, into life. The recipient imagination leaps upon the back of Pegasus; for like calls out to like, and a great person unconsciously requires us to greet him sympathetically with a kindred greatness. We ascend to something better than our ordinary self when we encounter the greatest maker of poems or of pies that happens to be living in our world. These encounters add a cubit to our stature, and send us back to our customary tasks "eager to labor and eager to be happy."

The mystic force called "personality" is nothing but an aura that is worn by people who can do some single thing extremely well and with consummate grace. Personality is always charming and enlivening; and the application of its power is not at all dependent on the exercise of that particular proficiency in which the person who attracts us may excel. Great people are not called upon to prove their greatness. Sarah Bernhardt, at the age of six and seventy, can no longer slink about the stage with that agile grace, as of a panther, that some of us remember: in fact, because of her amputated leg, she cannot walk at all. When the cur-

tain rises, she is now disclosed reclining on a couch or seated in a chair; and only at the climax does she climb to her feet — with obvious assistance — and thereby send a shudder through the audience. But her triumph comes early, at the very rising of the curtain, before she has made a movement, before she has uttered a single syllable with the shattered remnants of a voice that once was golden: for the audience immediately knows — without asking or waiting for any evidence — that this is one of the great women of the world. There are cheers and there are tears; for greatness is rare, and demands the sounding of sennets and the pouring of libations. Journeys are measured by mile-stones; and our journey through life is measured by those moments when we have been quickened into momentary greatness by contact with great people.

To be a great base-ball player is more impressive than to be a mediocre painter, a second-rate statesman, or an ordinary author. It is nobler to be able to beat the world at some plebeian task, like the sewing on of buttons, than to be an inefficient king or a defeated general. This the public always knows, without asking any questions; and nobody is certain or is worthy of applause unless he can do at least some little thing that he was born to do by nature, more perfectly than that thing can be done by anybody else. But such a person seems to be transfigured by the central and essential source of energy that lives within him; and this transfiguration easily includes whoever comes within the circle of its radiation. The service of great people to the public may be summed up in the saying that who-

ever looks upon or listens to them is always lifted, for the moment, out of mediocrity and required to ascend to the height of the occasion.

On the evening of October 22, 1917, the Lexington Opera House — which is one of the largest theatres in New York — was crowded from the floor to the roof. Hundreds of people were standing up, and hundreds of other people had been turned away. This vast audience sat respectfully through a vaudeville program of five preliminary numbers. At last the orchestra struck up with a medley of familiar Scottish airs, and there came a quickened sense of something wonderful about to be.

And then the miracle occurred. A little stocky man in a red kilt came trotting on the stage, and turned the funniest of faces to the footlights; and the whole enormous auditorium exploded with volley after volley of applause and the high shrill shriek of cheers. It was a long, long time before this thunderous initial roar subsided; but, when he could be heard, the funny little red-faced man proceeded to sing a song, with the refrain, "I'm going to Marry 'Arry, on the Fifth of Jan-u-ary." There was no art in the words and very little in the music; but there was great art in the rendering. The audience shouted with laughter; and every laugh came precisely at the predetermined moment, with the full power of three thousand pairs of lungs behind it.

Then came other songs; and the stocky little man, who had made that whole vast theatre-full of people laugh as one, soon made them weep as one, and ulti-

mately made them sing as one. His third or fourth number was a new song, which nobody had ever heard before; but, when Harry Lauder came to the refrain, he heard it taken up and hummed by hundreds and hundreds of voices in the auditorium. Then he paused; and, with consummate tact, he deliberately rehearsed the audience in the proper handling of the chorus, so that, when he came again to the refrain, the very walls resounded with the singing of a thousand happy people. These people had come to enjoy the art of Harry Lauder; but the great man had given them a greater gift by teaching them to enjoy themselves.

Through all of this, the present writer retained sufficient critical intelligence to perceive the artist's mastery of rhythm and of tempo, his marvelous sense of the emphasis of pause, and his genius for taking immediate advantage of every unforeseen reaction of the audience. He never said or sang a word too little or too much; he never overworked a laugh nor allowed a tear to dry and be forgotten. But these are minor matters: for art, however brilliant, must take second place to life, and it was life itself that Harry Lauder flung full-fingered through the auditorium. When calls for encores came, it was, "Harry, sing us this!" and, "Harry, sing us that!" for he was only Harry now, and hundreds of people were shouting loud the titles of the songs that they desired.

There were many, many calls for "Wee Hoose Among the Heather," but Harry paused before he rendered it. "That's nae mair a song," he said, "it's a hymn now"; and then he told how he had sung it

lately before fifteen thousand Scottish troopers at Arras. He sang it again in the Lexington Theatre; but it sounded now as if all Scotland had burst spontaneously into song.

And then the audience began to see the transfiguration of a great artist into a great man; for something had happened to the Harry Lauder that we used to know; and it was this: — Death had touched him with its accolade, and bidden him rise up as a knight-errant in a stricken world, where now he lives the life of two.

Sir Harry went down to Camp Upton to entertain our soldiers. He told them of the flowers of France, and how they grew in full profusion right up to the line that the Huns had marked with desolation. He told them of his love for France,— the second home and foster-mother of all the artists of the world, who worship Beauty, Truth, and Righteousness. Then he paused, and added,—"I own a bit of France now: my boy is buried there." . . .

III

HERO-WORSHIP IN THE DRAMA

"*Abraham Lincoln*"

Hero-worship, as Carlyle has told us, is a fundamental instinct of the human mind; and this is particularly evident whenever people are gathered together in crowds. Nothing else so strongly stirs emotion in a multitude as the visible presence of a hero, whatever be the nature of his prowess. Line Fifth Avenue with congregated thousands; let General Pershing ride adown that human lane on horseback; and only the walking dead will be callous to resist that gulping in the throat which is the prelude to enthusiastic tears.

In the good old days of baseball, this phenomenon could often be observed at the Polo Grounds, when Christopher Mathewson was called upon in the ninth inning to save a game that hung tremulously in the balance. It was beautiful to see him as he strolled serenely to the center of the diamond, apparently unconscious of the plaudits of the crowd. He was a great man in his own profession; and he had the dignity of greatness. He excelled all other pitchers; and this excellence was testified immediately to the eye by the unusual simplicity and ease of his bodily movements.

His two arms swept superbly upward in an absolute curve that reminded the spectator of Græco-Roman statues of athletes in the Vatican; and that was all. He had perfect personal poise; he was never nervous, never flustered, never angry. Mathewson made himself a hero not merely by his prowess, but also by his personality. The multitude adored him. And, by awakening this adoration, he bestowed a benefit upon uncounted crowds; for nothing more effectually emancipates the average man from his dreary prison-cell of self than a wished-for opportunity to worship some big person who does something — it does not really matter what it is — much better than that same thing could be done by himself or by anybody else.

The almost tragic need for heroes accounts for the abiding popularity of such otherwise inconsequential games as baseball, football, and boxing. Prize-fighting justifies itself when it permits a world of men and boys to worship such a hero as Georges Carpentier. Worship, in itself, uplifts the soul,— as men are helped by prayer, regardless of the god to whom they pray. Clemenceau — old in years, assailed by an assassin, smashed up in an accident, but still the Tiger of France — does good to his country by merely continuing to be, and thus permitting millions to adore him. Most of us are lowly people, and lead lowly lives; and, in order to "carry on," we need the spiritual sustenance of lifting our hearts up to the hills, whence cometh our strength.

In view of this fact, it is hard to understand why the theatre should persistently neglect its easy op-

portunity to exhibit figures of heroical dimensions. Every audience is a crowd, and is subject to the incentives of crowd psychology. Design a set of Gothic buildings, suggestive of mediæval Orleans; throng the stage with supernumeraries; decree an entrance of Jeanne d'Arc, clad in silvery armor and seated high upon a snow-white horse; and the audience will cheer, and the most case-hardened of dramatic critics will have a hard time trying to hold back his tears. For this is drama. The drama began in the church,— an institution which exists for the purpose of stimulating a wished-for mood of worship in a gathered multitude, to the end that souls of men may be uplifted toward their ultimate salvation.

What is the use of fiction if it cannot show us imaginable people who, in one way or another, are bigger than ourselves? The opportunity of the theatre is immense; for it may unlock for us the ivory gates that give upon immensity. Is it, after all, worth while to pay five dollars for the privilege of seeing the heroine of a bedroom farce dive under a bed, when the same expenditure of time and money might procure the great experience of awakening within us that quick response to the heroic which is evermore instinctive in a gathered crowd?

> "When the high heart we magnify,
> And the sure vision celebrate,
> And worship greatness passing by,
> Ourselves are great."

Because of the obtuseness of our American managers

— for our managers are more to be blamed than our playwrights for the vacuity of our American drama — it remained for an English poet, John Drinkwater, to discover the simple fact that a great emotion could be evoked from the gathered public by exhibiting upon the stage a hero so generally known and so unanimously worshiped as Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Drinkwater has drawn a portrait of Lincoln that is faithful to the truth — if not, at all points, to the facts — of history. That is, very nearly, all that he has done; but it is enough. It is better to spend two hours in the imagined presence of one of the greatest heroes of all time than to spend a hundred evenings at the Winter Garden; and this the public knows.

Mr. Drinkwater's play is so extremely simple that either it is artless or else it is one of those rare works in which the highest sort of art succeeds in concealing itself. It exhibits six successive episodes in Lincoln's career. These episodes are not related logically to each other; but each of them shows the hero at some moment when he is required to make a decision that shall determine not only his own future, but also the future of his country. On past occasions, I have sometimes disagreed with the theory of William Archer that the element of crisis is the one most indispensable element of the drama; but, on this particular occasion, I am constrained to agree with Mr. Archer, because Mr. Drinkwater has undeniably succeeded in setting forth a satisfactory portrait of Lincoln by adopting the easy expedient of showing him at six successive turning-points in his career.

At a hasty glance, this play might be dismissed as a mere summary in dialogue of the high spots in Lord Charnwood's biography of Lincoln; but a closer study of the text reveals the fact that Mr. Drinkwater has written a piece that is surprisingly effective, not so much by reason of what he has done as by reason of what he has resisted the temptation to do. His drama is singularly beautiful in its reticence, and all the more impressive by reason of its shy and quiet dignity. It is so deliberately untheatrical that it could hardly have been composed by an author who was not a master of the theatre. Mr. Drinkwater does not overstate the case for Lincoln; instead, he understates it, and thereby stimulates the audience to erect a huge, heroic statue of this man of many sorrows.

IV

NAPOLEON ON THE STAGE

Napoleon was a master-melodramatist. In any situation, he saw himself as an actor playing a part, and seldom failed to hit the histrionic note of the occasion. Even his enemies could not deny the popular appeal of his theatricism. When he escaped from Elba and landed in the south of France, he found himself confronted by a company of troops expected to be hostile. He stepped forward, flung back the flap of his overcoat, and cried, "Which of you will fire on your General?" The troops turned and marched behind him,— all the way to Paris. There was nothing else for them to do.

Even in his tomb, Napoleon speaks forth with the authentic voice of the greatest stage-director of all time. When you enter the Invalides, you are prepared for a profound emotion by the mystic bluish light that floats down from the dome and broods upon the huge sarcophagus with solemn grandeur. This meditative haze is emphasized by the golden glow that gleams about the altar. No more masterly stage-setting has ever been designed; but the climax of emotion comes when you read the great inscription that was written by Napoleon himself. "*Je désire que mes cendres reposent sur les bords de la Seine, au milieu de ce peuple français que j'ai tant aimé.*" Few there are

who can read this sentence without tears: — it is so triumphant in its trumpet-blare of prose.

Napoleon had many faults as a man, but none as an actor. The present age deplores and deprecates his lust for limitless dominion; future periods may refuse to laud him as an emperor, or even as a general; the world may finally regard him only as a lucky upstart and the arch-adventurer of history; but the time will never come when any commentator will deny that he was a noble artist. By sheer imaginative power, he managed to transform himself into a legendary figure which lives in the memory of all mankind with the immortal life shared only by the greatest characters of fiction and the drama. He is one with Hamlet, Don Quixote, and Œdipus the King.

Napoleon died in 1821,— which is nearly a century ago. Since then, his image, so easy to ape and imitate in make-up, has been often represented on the stage, but never adequately. Napoleon is easily the most dramatic and the most theatric figure bequeathed to memory by modern history; yet there is no great play about him. The reason is that no playwright has arisen in the world since 1821 whose imagination was sufficiently immense to cope with the unlimited theatrical fertility of Napoleon himself. Unfortunately for the drama, the author of *Coriolanus* died so long ago as 1616. Napoleon is not a character to be depicted by Pinero or Hauptmann or Brieux.

Many attempts by secondary playwrights to exhibit Napoleon as the hero of a drama have met with swift disaster. The reason was, in each case, that the image

in the public mind was bigger before the curtain rose than after it descended. It is always futile, in the theatre, to dissatisfy a high expectancy. As Emerson remarked to a youthful Harvard student who had written an essay in disparagement of the philosophy of Plato,—"When you strike at a king you must kill him."

The danger of attempting to depict Napoleon upon the stage, and of failing ignominiously in this high endeavor, was deftly dodged by so preëminent a dramatist as Edmond Rostand when he applied himself to the task of composing the Napoleonic drama called *L'Aiglon*. The great actor, Coquelin, had asked him for an opportunity to play a grumpy grenadier *à grandes moustaches;* and the part of Flambeau was conceived from this suggestion. But M. Rostand soon realized that Napoleon, if permitted to appear, would take the play away from the character designed for Coquelin. To keep Napoleon off-stage, the author advanced the period to 1830, when the emperor had been dead for nearly a decade and only his weakling son remained as a relict of his majesty. But, contrary to the author's expectation, the dead Napoleon still appealed so emphatically to the public through the person of the ineffective little boy whom he had left behind him, that the part of the Duc de Reichstadt took the play away from the part of Flambeau, and *L'Aiglon*, intended as a vehicle for Coquelin, became instead a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt.

Many dramatists have dodged the difficulty of attempting a life-sized portrait of Napoleon by intro-

ducing him as a subsidiary figure and depicting only a single aspect of his multifarious personality. This formula was followed by Sardou in *Madame Sans-Gêne.* Readers who remember the performance of this play by Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving will recall the fact that Napoleon was intended only as a minor character in the dramatic pattern; but they will also recall the more impressive fact that, when Irving entered, and exhibited his studious depiction of Napoleon, he ran away with the play — as actors call the process — and took the stage away, without intention, from Miss Terry.

The only way in which the figure of Napoleon has been successfully presented in the theatre is through the medium of the frankly antithetic mood of satire. An author, lacking eloquence to worship fittingly a monumental character, may manage, through sheer cleverness, to overturn the image and laugh at his own impudent audacity in exhibiting the statue upside-down. This procedure was followed by Bernard Shaw in his amusing skit, *The Man of Destiny.* The part of Napoleon, in this celebrated sketch of Mr. Shaw's, was played originally in this country by Arnold Daly; and Mr. Daly has more recently appeared before the public in another satirical depiction of Napoleon,— this time in a play by Herman Bahr entitled *Josephine.*

Herman Bahr is the second ablest living dramatist of Austria; and he is known already to the theatre-going public of New York as the author of *The Concert* and *The Master.* In the present episodic composition, Herr Bahr has attempted to depict Napoleon

from the point of view of his wife. There is a proverb which tells us that no man is a hero to his valet; and it may be stated, even more emphatically, that no man can ever hope to be a hero to the woman who has seen him brush his teeth and comb his hair. What Colonel Roosevelt once called "the heroic mood" demands an absolute defense against the impudent intrusion of the sense of humor; and this defense can seldom be maintained in the face of an admitted intimacy.

In the first act of this play, the heroine is overwearied by the amorous insistence of her recent husband; and, in order to get rid of him and to enjoy an opportunity for flirting with the cooler and less violent Barras, she contrives to have Napoleon directed by Barras to go away and conquer Italy. In the second act, we are told that the angry ardor of Napoleon in attacking the Austrians was inspired by his disappointment at receiving only niggardly and infrequent letters from Josephine. But his conquest of the Austrians raises him to a pinnacle of unexpected power; and this advancement of his destiny ironically overturns the tables of his domestic situation. Josephine henceforth besieges him for evidences of affection; and he finds himself too busy to pay attention to her.

The third act of this desultory chronicle contains a passage that is thoroughly delectable. Napoleon is about to be proclaimed and crowned as emperor; and he realizes, at this tardy moment, that, having begun life as a Corsican adventurer, he stands in need of lessons in imperial deportment. He sends, therefore, for the great actor, Talma, who has been famous for

depicting Roman emperors upon the stage for many years. Talma understands the art of seeming "every inch a king"; and Napoleon asks Talma to rehearse him in the unexpected part that he is called upon by destiny to play. Talma studies the physical peculiarities and limitations of Napoleon, and, after considerable thought, invents for him the legendary pose, with the right hand thrust into the left side of the waistcoat and the left arm hurled behind the body. Talma also teaches him the way to walk and the proper way to hold his head. It is needless to remark that this entire passage is deliciously satirical.

V

ACTING AND IMPERSONATION

George Arliss

In a recent Sunday issue of the *New York Times*, Mr. John Corbin published an interesting essay on acting and impersonation. He pointed out the fact that the ablest impersonators seldom make good actors and that great actors seldom make more than passable impersonators. The reason for this fact is very simple. Imitation is the method of impersonation, but the method of acting is suggestion. Acting is an art; and the important thing about it is that essential something which the actor has to say, through the medium of all his stage disguises. Acting, like any other work of art, can be no greater nor less great than the man who makes it. Its purpose is to stimulate the imagination of the spectator into a quickened consciousness of life. The actor's subject-matter is himself; and, in a high sense, it is his duty always to act himself, regardless of the make-up and the costume that he may be wearing in his part. If he is a great man, it is to be assumed that he "contains multitudes," as Whitman said, or, in other words, that he is really many men. Consequently he can play himself in a score of different rôles without incurring any danger of monotony. Thus Richard Mansfield was greater than any of his parts.

His performances of different characters were very different, and he was noted for his range and versatility: yet he was always Richard Mansfield, and it was mainly for this latter reason that the public always went to see him.

The impersonator, on the other hand, confesses that he finds no subject-matter in himself and asks for admiration of the trappings and the suits of his disguises. His stock in trade is a special talent for exactness of imitation; and, whenever imitation is exact, there is no art. "*C'est imiter quelqu'un que planter des choux*," said Alfred de Musset; or, as Mr. Austin Dobson has translated it, in the refrain of the best of his ballades, "The man who plants cabbages imitates too."

An almost uncanny instance of exactness in imitation was afforded by the late Benjamin Chapin's impersonation of Lincoln, which was exhibited on the lecture-platform, on the legitimate stage, and, later on, in moving-pictures. Mr. Chapin was endowed by nature with a striking physical resemblance to the martyred president. His figure was almost precisely a replica of Lincoln's; and his face could easily be changed to Lincoln's by a very simple make-up. Furthermore, Mr. Chapin made a life-long study of the character and personality of the hero whose aspect was all but repeated in his own; and, by virtue of this study, he was able to depict the mutable expressions of Lincoln's living countenance. Yet Mr. Chapin did not even claim to be an actor; and, so far as the present writer is informed, he never appeared before the public in any other part.

Cissie Loftus, despite the exceeding cleverness of her imitations, never achieved a notable success as an actress in the legitimate drama. In fact, there is a legend in the theatre — which may or may not be true — that once, when she was being rehearsed by the late Augustin Daly in the part of one of Shakespeare's heroines, Mr. Daly suddenly stopped the rehearsal and said, "My dear Miss Loftus, won't you please imagine the performance of some actress in this part, and then give us an imitation of her?" Elsie Janis can imitate Bernhardt and Ethel Barrymore; but she cannot act like either of them. Even so supreme an impersonator as Albert Chevalier, a man without a peer in his own profession, looked like an ordinary stock-comedian when he acted a part in a regular play. On the other hand, so distinguished an actor as John Drew appears in part after part without changing his mask or altering the cut and quality of his clothes, and yet contrives, by sheer suggestion, to create many living characterizations. Mr. Drew is always Mr. Drew; yet the people that he plays are by no means the same people; and even an admiring public does not always recognize the exercise of art required in order that Mr. Drew may seem so easily himself in all his different parts.

The distinction made by Mr. Corbin should constantly be borne in mind in judging performances upon the stage. It explains, for instance, the reason for the fact that so many minor actors who make emphatic hits in what art called "character parts" never succeed in climbing up to the rank of leading players. It also explains the fact that a great artist like Yvette

Guilbert can stand up in a corner of a room — without scenery, without make-up, without stage-costume, without any trick of lighting — and suggest, by sheer imaginative means, the very presence of any kind of woman, young or old, who ever lived in France. She does not have to smudge her face with coal in order to impersonate a scullery-maid, nor to wear a crown in order to impersonate a queen. I once saw Richard Mansfield, who was wearing a dinner-jacket at the time, change from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde in a chair of his own library, not more than half a dozen feet away from me. He had been asserting that the method of the true actor was to appeal to the imagination; and he performed this *tour de force* in order to convince me that he did not need the adventitious aid of lights and make-up, but could force me to imagine that I saw what he wanted me to see.

But, though Mr. Corbin's distinction is fundamentally sound, it must not be assumed that the art of acting and the craft of impersonation are never united in the same performance. A few great actors have also been remarkable impersonators, and have managed to combine the two methods of imitation and suggestion without any detriment to either. The most remarkable instance of this combination which has come within the range of the present writer's observation was the dual equipment of Sir Henry Irving. Irving was, first and foremost, a great actor; and that is only another way of saying that he was always Henry Irving. The personal aura of his keen imagination "informed"— in Aristotle's sense — every one of his creations. Yet

Irving was also an astonishing impersonator. Anybody who has seen his Charles I, his Napoleon, his Dante, will remember how absolutely different they looked from each other and from Irving himself. Irving was actually a tallish, slender man; but any one who saw him only as Napoleon would have sworn that he was short and stout. The stoutness, of course, was easy to manage; but how did the actor cut a cubit from his stature? As Napoleon, he trotted rapidly around with quick and nimble feet, and his gestures were hinged from the elbow and the wrist. As Charles Stuart, his stride was long and slow, majestic and a little languorous, and his gestures were hinged from the shoulder. The face of Irving's Charles was copied from the numerous great portraits by Van Dyck; and the head of his Dante was modeled from the bronze bust at Naples. But the craft of the impersonation did not end with this. Irving's Dante, as he walked, leaned forward and held his left shoulder a little higher than the other. These details, of course, were culled from the description by Boccaccio, who saw the Divine Poet with his own eyes when he himself was an observing little boy of nine.

Since the death of Sir Henry Irving, no other celebrated actor has also exhibited such clever achievements in impersonation as Mr. George Arliss. At the present time, Mr. Arliss is perhaps most noted for his impersonation of Disraeli; but he had already asserted his eminence in the finer art of acting long before he first put on the make-up of Lord Beaconsfield.

Mr. Arliss first came to this country in 1901 with

Mrs. Patrick Campbell and made a keen impression with his performances of Cayley Drummle in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and the Duke of St. Olpherts in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.* He was equally at home in both parts, although the former had been created by Mr. Cyril Maude and the latter by so different an actor as Sir John Hare. For some years after this, Mr. Arliss appeared in a series of eccentric characters, in which the note of comedy was usually paramount. He was then persuaded by Mr. David Belasco to appear in several sinister and malevolent rôles, such as that of the cynical hero of *The Devil* and that of the murderous prime minister in *The Darling of the Gods.*

Since Mr. Arliss, in these various disguises, contrived always to be somehow Mr. Arliss, we could have no surer proof that he is a gifted actor; for, off the stage, he is neither cynical nor eccentric. He is a man of keen intelligence, a scholar and a gentleman; and, in the habit of his mind, he is always simple, straightforward, and direct. He knows the art of acting not only sub-consciously, but also consciously, with an intelligence that is not only creative but critical as well. He is one of the few actors I have ever known who have been able and willing to explain how bad they were in performances for which they had been highly praised. When Mr. Arliss was appearing as Judge Brack with Mrs. Fiske in *Hedda Gabler,* he told me that his performance was all wrong, despite the fact that it had been greeted with golden encomiums from every critic in New York. "Brack ought to shake things when he

comes into a room," Mr. Arliss explained to me. "I can't do that; I am too slight and delicate; I have therefore been obliged to murder Ibsen's character and substitute a totally different fabrication; anybody who does not see this does not understand the play."

Mr. Arliss's Disraeli was a masterly impersonation; but — and this is the important point that the writer has been trying to lead up to — his Alexander Hamilton was scarcely an impersonation at all. It was that far finer thing — a bit of imaginative acting. Mr. Arliss, with the assistance of a very simple make-up, actually looked like Disraeli. He did not look like Hamilton, and he did not try to do so; he attempted instead to make his spectators imagine that he looked like Hamilton. Mr. Arliss has neither the face nor the figure depicted in the Trumbull portrait; and he is actually twenty years older than Hamilton was at the period of the play. Yet the dominating note of this imaginative exhibition was the note of almost boyish youthfulness; and there was never a suggestion of the sinister or the eccentric. This impersonator of many "character parts" succeeded even more emphatically in acting a "straight part"; he recreated on the stage a great and ingratiating person who is honored in history as one of nature's noblemen, and he made this person every inch a hero.

VI

JOHN BARRYMORE IN "RICHARD III"

The development of John Barrymore as a serious actor has been both gradual and thorough. He is, at the moment of the present writing [1920], thirty-eight years old. His rise has been so rapid in the last four years that his recent triumph in *Richard III* might be regarded as a sudden flash by the sort of people who think that genius is a miracle and do not know that it is neither more nor less than a tireless capacity for taking pains; but intimate observers of the work of Mr. Barrymore will regard his Richard, rather, as the logical result of long and careful years of preparation. His career is still in its ascendancy. Fine as his acting is to-day, there is every reason to believe that it will be finer in the years to come. Ten years from now, unless all indications fail, he should be established as one of the greatest actors in the history of our American theatre.

John Barrymore started out with many obvious advantages. He was born of an illustrious family, and absorbed in childhood the best traditions of the American theatre. He displayed at an early age an unusual talent for drawing, and began his work in life as a newspaper cartoonist. He did not go upon the stage till 1903, when he was twenty-one years old,— seven years later than the first appearance of his sister,

Ethel. There were plenty of people to teach him how to act; but he once told me that he had learned more from Willie Collier than from any other actor. He was, for several years, a member of Mr. Collier's company; and he was trained assiduously, throughout the decade of his twenties, to be a light comedian. Not even his best friends foresaw that he would some day develop into a tragic actor. The slightness of his figure and the shortness of his stature seemed to preclude him from undertaking heroic or impressive parts. His voice, though pleasing, was thin in quality, narrow in range, and monotonous in tone; and those who watched him closely could see that he was restricted by a paucity of gestures. His main assets were his handsome presence, his exceedingly sensitive and mobile face, and his charming personality. It was a whimsical personality, showing always an underlying glow of almost wistful poetry and irradiated every now and then with sudden flashes of brilliant wit. With ten or a dozen years of experience, John Barrymore grew to be a skilled farceur and one of the most entertaining performers on our stage. He became very popular, and, like many other "matinée idols," could always be counted on to draw the women in large numbers to the theatre. At the outset of his thirties, he had won both fame and fortune. Most actors, in such a situation, would have been contented with a fixed achievement, and would have continued, season after season, to play the same sort of popular parts in the same sort of popular farces; but John Barrymore was not contented with what he had done. He wanted to do something differ-

ent, and something better. He tried his hand at melodrama, in *Kick In*, a "crook"-play of no particular account, and showed for the first time that he could be not only amusing on the stage but thrilling as well. There were flashes of almost tragical intensity in his rendering of this vulgar but exciting melodrama. He was besieged at that time by many authors who wished him to make money for them by appearing in their farces; but he decided, in his own mind, that he would not act any more farces for a while.

An opportunity for more serious effort was afforded to Mr. Barrymore when John D. Williams offered him the part of Falder, in John Galsworthy's *Justice*. This was in the early spring of 1916. Those who were most intimate with John Barrymore at that time will remember how earnestly he grasped this opportunity. He went into training for the part, precisely as an athlete goes into training for a prize-fight or a race. Till then he had always seemed to take his work in a careless and easy-going manner; but there was nothing careless about his preparation for the part of Falder. He was, and is, one of the most modest actors I have ever known. One of his strongest assets as an artist is the fact that he is always keenly conscious of his own limitations; he may have fooled the public now and then, but he has never fooled himself; and, in 1916, he did not feel at all certain that he was capable of creating the sort of character that Mr. Galsworthy intended. Now that the event may be viewed in retrospect, I may perhaps be pardoned for narrating a little incident which I knew about at the time but which has never

yet escaped into print. A day or two before *Justice* opened at the Cohan & Harris Theatre — then called the Candler Theatre — John Barrymore happened to approach the front of the house, and saw his own name displayed in very large letters on the bill-boards, while the name of the author was extremely inconspicuous. He went into the managerial office and said,—"If anybody wants to see this play, it is not because John Barrymore is acting in it but because John Galsworthy wrote it. Take my name off the bill-boards, and print the name of the author in large letters. Otherwise, I shan't be here on Monday night." He meant what he said; and the change was made. The play achieved an unexpected success; and Mr. Barrymore astonished the public and the critics by the high sincerity and artistic self-effacement revealed by his enactment of the rôle of Falder.

At this time, Mr. Barrymore owed much to the sterling influence of one of his best friends,— the gifted author, Edward Sheldon. I believe that it was Mr. Sheldon who persuaded him to resist all offers to return to farce, and to undertake the title rôle in the late John Raphael's dramatization of George Du Maurier's immortal story, *Peter Ibbetson*,— a play that had been refused by many managers because they knew that there was no money in it. This project appealed particularly to John Barrymore because the part of Colonel Ibbetson would afford an opportunity for the return of his brother, Lionel, to the metropolitan stage, after a long and regretted absence. The piece was produced by Constance Collier and the Barrymore brothers; it

achieved not only an artistic but also a commercial success; and John Barrymore surprised his friends by the exquisite poetry of his performance.

By this time, John Barrymore had become a popular star in moving-pictures, and unlimited money was offered to him if he would devote his entire time to the "movies." I don't think that I am indiscreetly revealing a secret when I print the fact that Mr. Barrymore is not particularly interested in acting for the screen; but he has adopted a habit of devoting several weeks each summer to moving-picture work, with the frank intention of gathering in enough money to guarantee his undertakings in the theatre throughout the subsequent season. Mr. Barrymore and Arthur Hopkins were first attracted to each other by a common desire to produce *The Living Corpse*, by Count Leo Tolstoi; and, when this project was in contemplation, Mr. Barrymore returned to the "movies" for a while, to earn sufficient money to insure the production. I mention this fact merely to illustrate the point that Mr. Barrymore cares little about money for its own sake, but cares about it very practically as capital that may be employed for the propagation of art.

The Living Corpse — reëntitled *Redemption* — got off to a bad start, in the midst of an epidemic of influenza; but the business grew and grew, until this somber drama was established as one of the big successes of the season of 1918–1919. Nevertheless, the money-making run of *Redemption* was interrupted in mid-career, in order to clear the stage for a production of *The Jest* of Sem Benelli. Several months before this

event, John Barrymore told me that he was not confident that there was any money in *La Cena delle Beffe.* "But I want to do this Italian play," he said, "because it will afford an opportunity for my brother and myself to appear once more together in the same cast on Broadway. Lionel's part is showier than mine; he ought to make a big hit; that's the main thing that I care about." Lionel Barrymore, as everybody knows, fulfilled the confident prediction of his brother; but John's performance was the more difficult and the more delicate of the two. This poetic melodrama achieved an astonishing success. The English version was prepared in verse by Edward Sheldon; and this occasion afforded to John Barrymore his first opportunity to read verse upon the stage.

Already, this ambitious actor had cast his eye on Shakespeare. He was keenly conscious of the handicap imposed upon him by the fact that he had had no training whatsoever in the reading of verse or in the playing of Shakespearian parts. He was conscious also of the limitations of his slight physique and his restricted voice. He was conscious of his lack of scholarship, and began to study earnestly. He read Shakespeare, and discussed his text with noted scholars. He placed himself in the hands of a vocal expert, and devoted many weeks of practice to the gradual development of deep and rich and rounded tones in a voice that theretofore had been defective. He dedicated all his energies to this new task with his customary modesty: he knew very clearly what he did not know, and tried very hard to learn. I believe that it is now no secret that Hamlet

was the one part in Shakespeare that most attracted him; but, unlike most other actors, he was not at all sure that he was ready to play Hamlet. He saw the great Hamlet of Walter Hampden several times,— admired it, and praised it, and studied it. Then he began to consult his friends about the rôle of Romeo. I remember well the conflict between difficulty and enthusiasm which took place within his mind, in the spring of 1919, while he was considering this part. Ultimately he decided, very sagely, to make his first Shakespearian appearance in the rôle of Richard III, — a very showy part that is comparatively easy to depict. His rendition of this character is almost astonishingly fine; but to me it is, perhaps, most interesting in its subtle revelation of the actor's unbefuddled consciousness of his own restrictions and limitations at the present stage of his development. The cheers of the assembled audiences, the flow of money to the box-office, the extravagant laudations of the critics, have not persuaded Mr. Barrymore to believe that he is already a great actor. But he is destined to be a great actor,— one of the greatest actors of our American theatre. Of that I am confident, because I understand so clearly that he is willing and eager to learn what he has still to learn. Success will not stop him; because he is endowed with the rare virtue of modesty and the rarer capacity for taking infinite pains.

It is no longer a sacrilege to say that *Richard III* is not a great drama, although it is signed with the famous name of William Shakespeare. It is, in fact, one of the most ragged of the many "chronicle-his-

tories " that were hastily thrown together in the Elizabethan period, and is not at all comparable as a work of art with such more careful products as the *Edward II* of Christopher Marlowe, or the *Perkin Warbeck* of John Ford. Yet this piece has been kept alive in the theatre for more than three centuries by the lucky fact that its central figure offers a very showy and comparatively easy part that many generations of aspiring actors are ambitious to portray.

Richard III, though not printed till 1597, was probably written not later than 1593. We know with certainty that Marlowe collaborated with Shakespeare in preparing for the stage the three parts of the " chronicle-history " of *Henry VI;* and there are many items of internal evidence to indicate that Marlowe collaborated also in the concoction of *Richard III*. This would date the drama before the tragic death of Marlowe, who was born in 1564 and was murdered at the early age of twenty-nine. William Shakespeare was two months younger than his colleague. In those earliest days of the Elizabethan drama, Marlowe was undeniably the greater man of the two. It was this atheistic, flame-haired poet who first discovered the new idea that God and the Devil do not dwell afar,— in Heaven or Hell, but reside within the Soul of Man. Kit Marlowe imagined a new theme for tragedy,— the exhibition of a big man ruined from within by the defects of his own character. Ambition was the flaunting flag of Marlowe; and ambition was the subject that he analyzed, from one point of view or another, in all his tragedies. His Tamburlaine crashed downward to

disaster because of an insatiable lust for illimitable conquest; his Dr. Faustus was destroyed by an insatiable lust for illimitable knowledge; his Jew of Malta was ruined by an insatiable lust for illimitable wealth. In the "chronicle-history" of *Richard III*, this basic theme appears once more. The hero is ultimately shattered by an insatiable lust for illimitable power. The text, also, is replete with passages that resound with the martial march of Marlowe's "mighty line." Shakespeare may have been the main author of *Richard III;* but the point to be emphasized is that this was a very early play, concocted in the fever of their youth by a couple of hasty and careless and tremendous poets.

The "chronicle-histories" of the Elizabethan playwrights were produced continuously, one after another, like those puppet-plays of the Neapolitans that relate the legends of Carlomagno and take up the story every night where they left it off the night before. The points at which an Elizabethan drama of this type began and ended were, therefore, arbitrary and almost accidental. The figure of the bunch-backed Duke of Gloucester appeared, as a matter of course, in the later scenes of the "chronicle-history" of *Henry VI*, before a subsequent play was devoted to the record of his own reign. Colley Cibber, therefore, exercised a thoroughly legitimate prerogative when he decided to begin his depiction of the character of Richard III by presenting a couple of scenes culled from the antecedent "chronicle-history" of *Henry VI*. Cibber made his acting version of *Richard III* in a period when the name of Shakespeare was not so awe-inspiring as it

subsequently grew to be. He did not hesitate to rewrite the later passages of the play. It was Cibber, for example, who first introduced the famous line,—

"Chop off his head! So much for Buckingham!"—

or,

"Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!"—

for both versions are still extant; but this line was cleverly compounded out of scattered phrases that are discoverable, in different places, in the text of Shakespeare. Ever since the reign of Queen Anne, Colley Cibber's text of *Richard III* has held the stage, in preference to the earlier text of Shakespeare and Marlowe; and there seems to be no reason to regret this fact.

The present version has been prepared by an anonymous author; but it is possible, without violating confidences, to suspect the hand of Edward Sheldon. Until the time of Richard Mansfield, the hero of this melodrama had always been acted as a man of the same age from the outset to the termination of the play. The fact, of course, is evident that Shakespeare knew little and cared less about chronology; and there was no necessary reason why an actor should pay attention to the circumstance that the events narrated telescopically in this careless chronicle had, in actuality, been scattered through a period of not less than fourteen years. But Mansfield conceived the fresh idea of growing up and growing older as the play progressed; and this idea has been accentuated even more in the most recent version. The play begins with a rendition of

the very first scene in the very first act of the third part of the "chronicle-history" of *Henry VI;* and this new arrangement of the text affords to Mr. Barrymore an opportunity to make his first appearance as a callow fledging, before his subsequent ambitious purpose has been formulated in his scheming mind.

Mr. Barrymore's rendition of the rôle of Richard is — as I have said already — astonishingly admirable. To the surprise of many of his friends, he reads Elizabethan verse with a justness of ear that is all but impeccable. His one fault, in the delivery of the lines, is the evident fact that he is still restricted to a single tempo. His voice has been deepened, richened, and matured, by the careful tutelage to which he has subjected it; his enunciation is meticulously precise; but the fact is still apparent, to a careful listener, that he does not yet trust himself to read rapidly in scenes where haste is insistently demanded. *Richard III* is a headlong, hurrying, and hurly-burly sort of melodrama; and Mr. Barrymore calls undue attention to its manifest defects as a dramatic composition when he plays it with extreme deliberation.

Mr. Barrymore's greatest asset as an actor is the mobility of his sensitive and beautiful face; and his facial play, in the depiction of this part, is wonderful to look upon. As a self-examining artist, Mr. Barrymore is clever enough to know that his face is more effective than his voice. In consequence, he has concentrated his attention on a psychological analysis of the successive moods of Richard; and his performance of the part is mainly mental.

Oddly enough, he has missed the point, which seems to me apparent, that Richard of Gloucester was not only agile in mind but also agile in body. Despite his physical deformities, this bunch-backed king was undeniably an athlete. Richard Mansfield skipped and pranced throughout the early scenes, and fought his way through the final battle with a dauntless physical agility; but Mr. Barrymore plays the entire part as quietly and carefully as if he were depicting a mainly meditative character, like Hamlet.

It is apparent to a careful eye that Mr. Barrymore still suffers from a paucity of free and easy gestures, and that he is just as cleverly aware of this present limitation as he is keenly conscious of his present inability to read verse rapidly. His performance, from the outset to the end, is interesting and absorbing; yet, at many moments, a friendly observer was moved to wonder why it should fall short, with such sudden and unexpected emphasis, of the well-remembered performance of Richard Mansfield.

It is rather garrulous to rake up the past; but I remember now that Mansfield told me more than once — in the glowing hours after midnight — that his rendition of *Richard III* was the finest that had ever been shown upon the stage or that ever would be shown. He did not argue: he merely asserted and explained. "The fellows who come after me," he said, "will miss my point that Richard was a romping athlete in his youth and then subsequently lost his guts when he was stabbed successively by the many terrors accumulated in the region of his large, ambitious mind."

Comparisons are inevitable; and it is obvious, of course, that Mansfield was endowed with a better equipment for this particular part than Mr. Barrymore. Though just as short in stature as Mr. Barrymore, Mansfield was much more mighty in physique and immeasurably more powerful in voice. In Mr. Barrymore's performance, the famous dream-scene is comparatively ineffective. This actor can do nothing to approach that tremendous effect of Mansfield's when he falteringly touched the armor of the entering Ratcliff and let out a blood-curdling yell when he discovered that this emissary was not a ghost. Mansfield, also, easily excelled Mr. Barrymore in resiliency and variety,— except in the single detail of facial expression. But there is one moment, at least, where Mr. Barrymore surpasses his great predecessor. This is at the close of that sardonic scene in which Richard is offered the crown. Mansfield, at that moment, employed the traditional "business," with elaborations of his own. He pretended to read his prayer-book sedulously until the delegation of citizens had left the stage. Watching their exit with the tail of his eye, he subsequently looked back at his breviary and discovered that he had been holding it upside down. He turned it about with a sarcastic smile. Then he closed the scene by flinging the prayer-book triumphantly over his shoulder. Mr. Barrymore has canceled this traditional, and undeniably effective, bit of "business," and has substituted something better. Left alone on the stage, he slowly draws himself up to a kingly stature, by standing on his toes, while his right hand

trembles up in a triumphant gesture, as if it grasped already an imaginary sceptre.

In the dificult scene of the wooing of Lady Anne, Mr. Barrymore is very interesting to watch, because of the sly and subtle handling of his face and of his voice; but, in my opinion, his performance of this passage is far inferior to Mansfield's, because Mr. Barrymore plays the entire scene flat-footed. His mental agility is marvelous; but he shows no physical agility at all. His steps and gestures reveal a sense of stricture that is still to be regretted; and his work is further handicapped by the fact that Lady Anne — who ought, of course, to run away from him, and to lead him a chase around the dumb accusatory body of the murdered king — stands anchored in one spot upon a large and empty stage, as if her fleeing feet had been caught in a rabbit-trap.

The evident defects of Mr. Barrymore's astonishingly fine performance are emphasized, from the outset to the end, by the faulty stage-direction of the play. In every scene, every actor — with the single exception of Mr. Barrymore — has apparently been ordered to stand still, upon a predetermined spot, and never, under any circumstances, to use his arms for the purposes of natural gesticulation. The resultant effect is manifestly artificial. The whole production looks very much like a revelation of the imaginative adventures of Mr. Barrymore among a group of wax figures, bought at auction from the Eden Musée.

The supporting company appears to be so very bad that a charitable critic is moved to wonder whether

these same actors might not have managed to acquit themselves with better credit, if their natural efforts to act had not been paralyzed by the apparent tyranny of an inhibitory stage-director. There is, of course, a time-tested formula of practice which assures us that all eyes will be focussed on the "star" of a performance if no other actor is allowed to move a muscle while the "star" is active on the stage; but John Barrymore is already an artist of such excellence that he does not need at all to resort to this mechanical method of focussing attention on himself. I have always known him, personally, to be a very modest man; and I cannot believe that he has consciously resorted to this silly subterfuge for apparently exalting himself above his fellow-actors. I am inclined, therefore, to assign the blame for the faulty stage-direction of this play to Arthur Hopkins, who has been willing to assume, upon the printed program, his due share of responsibility for an undertaking that is emphatically inartistic. Mr. Hopkins has long nurtured a theory that stage-direction should be "simple." It is easy enough to "simplify" the art of acting, if all save one of the performers are forbidden to move their legs or arms. But the sort of "simplicity" which denies a natural expression of the spontaneous impulsions of life itself is not a thing to be desired.

But, though the stage-direction of *Richard III* is manifestly bad, the collaborative contribution of the art-director, Robert Edmond Jones, is worthy of unstinted praise. In true Elizabethan fashion, he has erected a single and permanent set, which may be al-

tered in a few seconds to suit the momentary exigencies of the ever-changing narrative. His successive designs are simple in conception, effective in composition, and harmonic in color; and he has handled in a masterly manner the contributory element of stage-illumination.

VII

THE PERMANENCE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

Henry Bernstein

Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well: and this is the only answer that is necessary to critics who question the importance of technical accomplishment in art. In that decadent period which suddenly ceased to be in August, 1914, a hare-brained handful of young anarchs in all the nations that had gone to seed asserted, very noisily, that art was merely a matter of impulse and was not dependent upon craftsmanship. The first duty of the painter,— we were told, — was not to learn to paint; the first duty of the writer was not to learn to write; the first duty of the musical composer was not to learn the laws of harmony and counterpoint. The cubists, the futurists, the imagists, the vorticists,— one can't remember any longer the interminable list of "ists"— proclaimed that crudity was a proof of genius and that the aim of art was to be emphatically inartistic. This disease attacked the drama; and the heresy was held that the one thing that a playwright should avoid was any effort or ambition to produce a well-made play. The very phrase —"a well-made play"— was bandied about by anarchistic critics as if it were a badge of scorn. We were

asked to admire *The Madras House* of Mr. Granville Barker — the most appallingly unpopular play that has been produced in London within the memory of living men — for the reason that it was inchoate and helter-skelter, like a London suburb, instead of planned and patterned, like that Lantern of the World, the high Acropolis. Even Mr. Bernard Shaw, who had made great plays and made them well — consider *Candida,* for instance — caught the fever, and allowed himself — in *Getting Married* and in *Misalliance* — to make two plays as badly as he could, in order to prove himself a "genius."

The criticism of that now-forgotten period was marked by a jaunty impudence toward any craftsman who had ever taken pains to learn his craft. Stevenson was sneered at, because of his picked and polished prose; Raphael was ridiculed, because he knew how to draw; Tennyson was insulted, because of his unfaltering and faultless eloquence; Pinero was patted scornfully upon the head because he happened to be the ablest living master of his craft. It was assumed that, if a man had taken time and pains to learn to say things well, he could not possibly have anything to say. A respect for the traditions of the past was airily dismissed as "mid-Victorian." It was considered merely "scholarly" and "dull" for any person to remember the almost religious reverence of such a master-craftsman as Velasquez for the very tools of his trade. Poor Velasquez! — he had never learned to paint carelessly and badly: — he was, therefore, not a "genius," after all!

That anarchistic period is past. The world is done with mental drunkenness and with the lassitude that comes of over-leisure. The change came when the earth was rocked with war, and nothing any more was heard except the clarion that called to battle "the army of unalterable law." Rheims was bombarded: Venice was endangered: and men who loved both Rheims and Venice learned to die for those ideals that erring little creatures used to laugh at, a little — such a little — while ago. The rasping and discordant Ezra Pounds have ceased from troubling; for the Rupert Brookes and Alan Seegers have gone smilingly to Keats, and sit with him serenely in that region where Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, and there is never any question of the axiom.

Thoughts fade and die; ideas are transitory; opinions pass like little ripples on the surface of an utterly immeasurable sea. Even the seeming certainties of science crumble and decay, like rocks beneath the beating of repeated rain. What survives? . . . Let Mr. Austin Dobson answer, with these lines: —

> All passes. Art alone
> Enduring stays to us.
> The Bust out-lasts the Throne,—
> The Coin, Tiberius.

Only,— the bust must be beautiful, and the coin must be cunningly designed; for, in the league-long history of art, there is "no antidote against the opium of time" except that Workmanship which is won only by good and faithful servants.

Much has been said about the "message" of the artist; but, to any great artist, his material seems less important than his method. Thoughts, opinions, and ideas may be controverted within that winking of an eye that mortals call a century; but Time itself can cast no dust upon a piece of work that has been done supremely well. The world no longer seriously ponders the abstract contributions made to philosophic thought by Thomas De Quincey; but such a pattern of alliteration as, "Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn," will never be forgotten, so long as living men have ears to hear. This man knew how to write. That is his epitaph; and it is also the token of his immortality. World-conquering religions, after centuries, dissolve themselves into discarded myths: but eloquence lives on. Artistry — or to call it by that other and more ugly name, Technique — is not a matter to be laughed at, after all: for technique is the sole preservative of art against corruption and decay.

In *L'Elévation*, that clever craftsman, M. Henry Bernstein, has endeavored to express that exaltation of the spirit which was suddenly and unaccountably required from more than forty million souls in France by the onslaught of the Hun against the gate. This is a theme that, preferably, should have been discussed by a playwright more endowed by nature to ascend with soaring wings to the height of the occasion; for M. Bernstein — despite his admirable ingenuity — is not, by any means, a poet. *L'Elévation*, because of its material, is the most appealing of his plays: it is im-

pressive, also, by virtue of the fact that it is less mechanical in method, and more augustly simple, than the intricately clever compositions that have made this author famous in the past. But there still remains a hint of calculation behind its mood of spirituality; and, though it is a noble work, one feels at times a disappointing wish that it had been written by a nobler man. In other words, the critical observer is not entirely convinced that M. Bernstein was the proper and inevitable person to write this *épopée* of France.

The play begins by setting forth the old conventional triangulation of husband, wife, and lover. The only novel circumstance is that this first act is dated in August, 1914. The lover is immediately called to the colors; the wife, when questioned by her husband, refuses to kill time by telling lies; and the husband, though deeply wounded by her guilt, suggests a sort of moratorium of the emotions until assaulted France is saved and humanity has reachieved the leisure to be human once again.

The second and third acts reveal an almost miraculous transfiguration of each of the three figures involved in this conventional entanglement, because of the redeeming sense — which has come to each of them in turn — that nothing really matters except France. The injured husband grows too generous to blast the reputation of his rival by the easy means of showing many damnatory letters, written by that unreliable and faithless lover in the careless days before the war; the erring wife accepts a martyrdom of social obloquy, in order to sit by the bedside of her wounded lover,

where all the world may see her; and the lover — who, formerly, was nothing more than a cynical and sinful rambler of the boulevards — dies like a hero, for the sake of an ideal that he had never understood until he had been called upon to bleed and suffer for it. Each of these three people has been ennobled by an overwhelming need to sacrifice the element of self for the sake of humanity at large.

VIII

THE LAZINESS OF BERNARD SHAW

About a dozen years ago, Mr. Bernard Shaw appears to have decided that there was such a thing as being too proud to write. Like many other men of slow beginnings who have suddenly achieved a huge success, he turned lazy at the very height of his career and ceased to take his own profession seriously. Mr. Shaw had waited long for recognition. Then, suddenly, by reason of the enterprise of Mr. Arnold Daly in this country and Mr. Granville Barker in England, he flashed forth unexpectedly as one of the most successful of contemporary dramatists. His success had been earned honestly by "hard study and long practice,"— to quote a phrase made almost classical by the ablest of all living dramaturgic craftsmen, Sir Arthur Pinero; but this success had been so long deferred, and was ultimately launched so swiftly, that — temporarily, at least — it turned the head of Mr. Shaw. The author of such well-made plays as *Arms and the Man* and *Candida* and *You Never Can Tell* and *Man and Superman* decided — at the age of nearly fifty — that it was no longer necessary for him to undergo the manifest discomfort of making plays as well as he knew how to make them. He assumed that the critics would praise and the public would applaud anything that he might subsequently sign, whether it might happen to be good

or happen to be bad. Betrayed by this assumption, he relaxed into a period in which he allowed himself the lazy luxury of writing down whatever chanced to occur to him,— without forethought, without selection, and without arrangement,— and adopted the audacious practice of calling the resultant mess a play. For this impudence, Mr. Shaw was promptly rebuked in London by the total failure of *Getting Married* and *Misalliance;* and he found himself so much discredited that, in order to recapture the good graces of the public, he was forced to write a carefully constructed comedy and to launch it, in 1911, without his name upon the program. *Fanny's First Play* succeeded, because of its inherent merits, before the London public had discovered that Mr. Shaw had written it. In New York, both *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* have fared better than in London. Our public is less exacting than the public of the older capital; and we are more inclined toward the naïve assumption that anything that is signed with a big name must be a big work. We Americans are fond of bowing down to celebrated names. In illustration of this point, it is necessary only to call attention to the covers of our current magazines.

No other dramatist than Mr. Shaw would have been permitted — to state the matter in a vivid phrase of current slang — to " get away with " the lazy last act of *The Doctor's Dilemma* or the feeble and faltering construction of *Pygmalion.* As for *Getting Married* and *Misalliance,* their utter formlessness was actuated by the fact that they were easy to write. The author

of a play so nearly great as *Candida* must have known as well as any other playwright or dramatic critic that these incoherent and protracted conversations were lacking in all of the essential merits of dramaturgic composition. He deliberately set them forth and — to quote another phrase of current slang — attempted cunningly to "put them over," because, at the moment, he despised the public that applauded him.

In this procedure, there is discernible what may be called an intimation of immorality. One of the highest and holiest of proverbs is the one which tells us that *noblesse oblige*. If the true artist may claim in any way to be superior to common men, it is only because his mental code calls for a stricter obedience to the dictates of a more exacting conscience. It is a point of morality for the true artist never to sign his name to any bit of work, however humble in intention, that he knows to be unworthy of the talents with which he finds himself endowed. An artist may be forgiven for a failing of his powers that may be caused by illness, temporary perturbation, senility, or any of a multitude of other causes that are clearly beyond his own control; but an artist should never be forgiven who, in the undisrupted plenitude of his ability, does work which he knows to be unworthy, for the simple reason that he deems it no longer necessary to exert himself in order to succeed.

Of all artistic tasks, there is none more difficult than the architectonic task of building a play; but, of all literary exercises, there is none more easy than to pen an endless stream of incoherent dialogue. For Mr.

Shaw, the task of writing dialogue is even exceptionally easy, because he has a special gift for witty conversation. The dialogue of his indolent and sloppy pieces is fully as amusing as that of his other and earlier plays which are worthy of respect because of the dignity of their construction. But the pity of it is that a man who had been capable of building *Candida* should cease to be a master-builder, or, indeed, a builder at all; and that this infidelity to a high vocation should be motivated by both laziness and insincerity. *Noblesse oblige;* and Mr. Shaw should have set a more inspiring example for younger playwrights who, in later years, may be tempted also, by some sudden showering of wealth and fame, to deride the very public that has treated them with courtesy and kindness.

As a propagandist, Mr. Shaw is never insincere: he believes his own opinions, even at those many moments when they happen to be wrong: but, as an artist, he is often insincere, and on this point it is easy to convict him out of his own mouth. Consider, for example, the impudent announcement which he printed as a prefatory note to *Getting Married:*—"There is a point of some technical interest to be noted in this play. The customary division into acts and scenes has been disused, and a return made to unity of time and place, as observed in the ancient Greek drama. . . . I find in practice that the Greek form is inevitable when drama reaches a certain point in poetic and intellectual elevation." This statement, as applied to *Getting Married,* is not true: and — what is more important — Mr. Shaw knows as well as any other critic that it is not

true. *Getting Married* is not Greek in form; and it never reaches a point of either poetic or intellectual elevation. It is nothing but a witty conversation, without beginning, without middle, without end, devoid of plot, devoid of climax, devoid of all those other virtues of technique that were codified and analyzed by Aristotle. The Greeks were mighty architects of plays; and *Getting Married* no more resembles *Œdipus the King* in structure than a diamond necklace resembles the Parthenon. Mr. Shaw is an educated man. He must have studied at some time or other the *Electra* of Sophocles, the *Trojan Woman* of Euripides, and the *Poetics* of Aristotle: he cannot honestly plead ignorance of the principles and practice of the most strictly architectonic drama that the world has ever known: and, when he says that *Getting Married* is " classical " in form, he is talking with his tongue in his cheek. Not even Mr. Shaw can make a bad play look like a good play by writing a criticism of it which he knows to be a lie.

Misalliance, which immediately failed in London when it was first produced in 1910, is the poorest play that Mr. Shaw has ever written. Like *Getting Married*, it is merely a continuous but incoherent conversation that lasts for two hours and a half. In the earlier composition, most of the talk was centered on the topic which gave the piece its title; but, in *Misalliance*, the ventriloquial puppets of the author discuss a score of different topics which reveal no logical relation to each other. I have seen *Misalliance* once and read the text three times; and yet I find myself unable to discover

what the piece is all about. Not only does it lack a story and a plot, but it also lacks a theme.

There are nine characters in *Misalliance*, and all of them are mad. Furthermore, they all suffer from the same kind of insanity. Their minds have all become unbalanced by the fact that their mental processes are merely intellectual. All nine of these puppets think as clearly and as cleverly as Mr. Shaw; but none of them can feel, and by that token none of them is human. Stab them with a dagger, and you will merely ruffle straw: they have no blood within them.

IX

SATIRE ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

It has frequently been pointed out that the ability to laugh is the only function that distinguishes mankind from all the lower animals. Furthermore, a man's degree of evolution may be measured by the sort of things at which he laughs most heartily. There are many different grades of refinement in the sense of humor,— so many that to codify them all would require the attention of a profound philosopher. I have never read the celebrated essay of M. Henri Bergson on the subject of laughter, and cannot tell — in consequence — whether or not he has covered the field: but this point, at least, is pertinent,— that it is possible to paraphrase an ancient proverb by saying, "Tell me what you laugh at, and I will tell you what you are." If any evidence were needed to confute the utterly unreasonable statement that "all men are created equal," it would be necessary merely to point out that all men do not laugh at the same order of ideas. The Germans laughed when the *Lusitania* went down; and by this laughter they distinguished themselves from the preponderent proportion of mankind.

It is easy enough to laugh at physical eventualities. When a man's feet slip from under him and he falls "with a dull, sickening thud" on the fattest and least

vulnerable part of his anatomy, no human observer of the incident can easily suppress a loud guffaw. The appeal of such material is perpetuated in the theatre by the proverbial slap-stick [which the greatest of all comic dramatists did not forbear to use in such farces as *Les Fourberies de Scapin*], and is kept alive forever by an endless race of amply-cushioned actresses like Marie Dressler.

A slightly higher degree of evolution is demanded before a man can learn to laugh at mental accidents. The French — in their reasoned catalogue of criticism — have registered a clear distinction between the *mot de situation* and the *mot de caractère.* To the common mind, it is obviously funny for any one to fall downstairs; but a greater degree of culture is required to realize the fact that some people may be funnier still if they merely walk downstairs and never fall at all. Of a certain small but very pompous citizen, some happy-minded commentator once remarked that he always seemed to strut while sitting down; and this phrase may be accepted as an illustration of what the French intend by a "quip of character."

But it is still comparatively easy to laugh at some one else; and civilization may be said to begin at the point when a man becomes capable of laughing also at himself. It is easy to be humorous; it is harder to sustain a sense of humor. It is easy to make fun, at the expense of the other fellow: it is harder to take fun, at the expense of oneself. Some of our greatest humorists have — by common account — been deficient in the receptive sense of humor. I never knew Mark Twain,

— although I met him half a dozen times and talked with him as a very young apprentice would naturally talk with an admitted master; but many of his friends have told me that this monumental humorist was incapable of seeing and accepting a joke against himself.

A slightly higher rung upon the ladder is attained when men begin to laugh at words, and at the jugglery of words, instead of laughing merely at situations or at people. Words are symbols of ideas; and only a civilized person can see the fun in an idea. When Oscar Wilde permitted one of his puppets to say, "I can resist anything except temptation," he carried laughter into the realm of the philosophical abstract.

As a test of the different degrees of humor, the reader may be recommended to enter any barber's shop and say, with due solemnity, "I desire a diminution of the linear dimension of my capillary appendages." An uncivilized barber will be offended, and may even cause the philosophical experimentor to be ejected from his chaste establishment [for there is nothing more offensive to the common mind than the sort of humor that it cannot understand]; but a civilized barber will say, "Oh hell! — you mean a haircut!," and will proceed, with laughter, to suit his action to your words.

A still higher realm is reached when the ideas that are laughed at are the very ideas that are held most seriously by the man that leads the laughing. This is the realm of satire,— which must consequently be regarded as the most loftily developed mood of humor. The satirist laughs not only at himself but also at those

very thoughts which he regards as the light and leading of his life. A humorist can make a joke; a man endowed with the more subtle sense of humor can see and take a joke against himself; but a satirist can see and make a joke against his very God. Many things in life are holy; but to the satirist the gift of laughter is more sacred than any of the others.

The satirical mood may be illustrated easily by reference to Lord Byron's immense and teeming poem called *Don Juan.* Time after time, in the course of this composition, the poet winged his way aloft on a wind of lyric inspiration,— only to pause suddenly and laugh tremendously at the very incentive that had excited him to eloquence. When I was in my teens, I used to hate this poem, because of Byron's habit of laughing in his loftiest moments and blaspheming [as it seemed to me] against the dictates of his genius; but, in recent years, I have begun to appreciate [and almost to admire] his nimbleness of mind in presenting an august idea from antithetic points of view. Any man can see a subject from one side: but the mark of culture comes when a man is able to see a subject from several sides at once.

The satiric mood demands an extraordinary alertness of intelligence, not only on the part of the humorist, but also on the part of his audience. Mr. Chesterton, for instance, whose essential mood is one of deep religious reverence, has a disconcerting habit of laughing his way into the very presence of his God; and this habit is bewildering to minds that are less cultivated than his own.

Satire — which may be defined as an irresponsible and happy-hearted toying with ideas — can flourish only in those ages which acknowledge an obeisance to the high ideal of culture. Satire can be conceived and written only by gentlemen — like the Roman Horace, the French Boileau, the English Dryden, or the American Henry James. A man must be distinguished before he can afford to laugh in public against the very things he holds most holy. Also, he must feel assured of the existence of an agile-minded audience to appreciate the perilous gymnastics of his mind.

Our American theatre has long been regarded as uncivilized; but a certain sign of promise has been registered by its recent tentative incursions into the unprecedented realm of satire. If our native playwrights can afford to be satirical, a time has come at last when our American theatre may be accepted as a grown-up institution.

The popular success of *Why Marry?*, by Jesse Lynch Williams, obtrudes a hopeful indication that our theatre is becoming civilized. This piece has been published by Charles Scribner's Sons — under the different title, *And So They Were Married:* and it constitutes a contribution not only to the American drama but also to American literature.

In *Why Marry?*, the merits and demerits of marriage as a social institution are discussed from every imaginable point of view. The author has no thesis to expound, unless it be a general suggestion that, though marriage bears a load of scarlet sins upon its back, it is at least more easily endurable than any substitute

that has been offered for defining the essential unit of society. Each of the contrasted characters is provided with a theory that he or she is prepared to defend and fight for; but it should be registered to the author's credit that he permits his characters to express and illustrate their several opinions without obtruding any comment of his own.

The piece, of course, invites and challenges comparison with *Getting Married* and with *Misalliance*. The present critic does not hesitate to state that Mr. Williams's comedy is superior to either of these compositions by the celebrated Mr. Shaw. From the technical point of view, the superiority of the American fabric is so manifest that it requires no discussion. Mr. Williams tells an interesting story; this story is practicable for the stage; it is coherently constructed; it shows what Aristotle called "a beginning, a middle, and an end"; and it rises to a climax when a climax is expected and desired by the audience. These merits, — culled from any A — B — C of dramaturgy — are mentioned merely because, in the recent comedies of Mr. Shaw, they have been more honored in the breach than in the observance.

A more important point is that Mr. Williams — by virtue, possibly, of his experience as a novelist — has created real and living characters; whereas Mr. Shaw — in the compositions under question — has created merely talking dolls. It is difficult to go out to dinner without sitting down beside one of the people that Mr. Williams has imagined; but none of us will ever actually

meet the brilliant super-puppets invented by the arch-ventriloquist of the contemporary theatre.

The dialogue of Mr. Williams is nearly as witty as the dialogue of Mr. Shaw; and it is much more humorous and human. To use once more the definite phraseology that has been bequeathed to us by the French,—the Irish satirist is more inclined to *mots d'esprit* and the American is more inclined to *mots de caractère.* There is an undercurrent of emotion and of friendly sympathy for human nature in this comedy by Mr. Williams that is lacking in all but the very foremost plays of Mr. Shaw.

X

THE CAREER OF "CAMILLE"

The career of *La Dame aux Camélias* is, in many ways, unique in the annals of the theatre. In the opinion of the best French critics [and the French are very careful in their criticism] this play has never been regarded as a masterpiece, nor was it rated very highly by the author himself; yet, though over sixty years have now elapsed since the date when it was first produced in Paris, *La Dame aux Camélias* is still popular throughout the theatre of the world, and bids fair to be applauded a century from now, when the later and greater plays of the same writer have been relegated to the library.

Alexandre Dumas *fils* was born in 1824; and he was scarcely more than twenty-one when he wrote his first successful novel and called it *The Lady of the Camellias*. The material was drawn directly from his own immediate experience of that "demi-monde" of Paris to which he had been introduced by his prodigal and reckless father. As he said in later years, this youthful narrative was "the echo, or rather, the re-action, of a personal emotion." The book was immature, and sentimental, and immoral; but, in the turbulent days which anteceded the Revolution of 1848, it made a momentous impression on the reading public. The

project of dramatization was suggested to the author; and he asked the advice of his famous father, who was perhaps the ablest playwright of the period. The elder Dumas reported to his son, regretfully, that it was impossible to turn the novel into a practicable play; and Alexandre Dumas *père* nearly always had the right idea in regard to questions of success or failure in the theatre.

Nevertheless, the youthful writer decided to waste a week or two in an attempt to dramatize his novel. He retired to the country, and wrote the play in eight successive days. Since the piece is in four acts, it will be noted that he allowed himself precisely two days for the composition of each act. It may be doubted if any other play which has held the stage for more than half a century has ever been written so quickly and so easily; but of course we must remember that the author was already familiar with his plot and with his characters before he sat down to write the dialogue of his play.

Yet, after the play had been completed, there was a doubt for many months that it would ever be produced. Although it had been dramatized from a successful novel, and although it was signed by the son of one of the most famous novelists and dramatists of France, it was rejected by nearly every theatre in Paris. After three years of hopeless wandering, the manuscript was ultimately accepted at the Vaudeville, only to be interdicted by the censorship. After new delays occasioned by political contentions, *La Dame aux Camélias* was finally produced in Paris, at the Vaudeville, on Febru-

ary 2, 1852. The author was, at that time, less than twenty-eight years old. The piece achieved an instantaneous success in France, and has since been added to the repertory of every other nation in the theatre-going world. It may be doubted if any other play composed since the initiation of the modern drama in 1830 has been so continuously popular in every country of the habitable globe.

In the opinion of those disinterested critics whose judgment is not conditioned by the verdict of the box-office, *La Dame aux Camélias* has always been regarded as inferior to many of its author's later plays, and especially to his admitted masterpiece, *Le Demi-Monde*. According to the judgment of the present commentor, Alexandre Dumas *fils* wrote, first and last, no less than half a dozen dramas which are more important, from the point of view of art, than this youthful effort that was struck off at white heat. The faults of *La Dame aux Camélias* are many and apparent. The view of life expressed is sentimental, immature, and in the main untrue. The thesis is immoral, because we are asked to sympathize with an erring woman by reason of the unrelated fact that she happens to be afflicted with tuberculosis. In the famous "big scene" between the heroine and the elder Duval, the old man is absolutely right; yet the sympathy of every spectator is immorally seduced against him, as if his justified position were preposterous and cruel. The pattern of the play is faulty, because it rises too quickly to its climax — or turning-point — at the end of the second act, and thereafter leads the public down a descending

ladder to a lame and impotent conclusion. In the last act, the coughing heroine — like Charles II — is an unconscionable time a-dying. The writing of the dialogue is artificial and rhetorical. Indeed, this noted play exhibits many, many faults.

Why, then, has it held the stage for more than half a century? And why, if it is not a great drama, does *La Dame aux Camélias* still seem destined to enjoy a long life in the theatre? The obvious answer to this question leads us to explore an interesting by-path in the politics of the theatre. This celebrated piece is continually set before the public because every actress who seeks a reputation for the rendition of emotional rôles desires, at some stage of her career, to play the part of Marguerite Gautier — or, as the heroine is called more commonly in this country, Camille. This part is popular with actresses for the same reason that the part of Hamlet is popular with actors. Both rôles are utterly actor-proof; and anybody who appears in the title-part of either piece is almost certain to record a notable accretion to a growing reputation. No man has ever absolutely failed as Hamlet; and no woman has ever absolutely failed as Camille. On the other hand, an adequate performance of either of these celebrated parts offers a quick and easy means for adding one's name to a long and honorable list, and being ranked by future commentators among a great and famous company of predecessors.

Here, then, we have a drama which is kept alive because of the almost accidental fact that it contains a very easy and exceptionally celebrated part that

every ambitious actress wants to play. *La Dame aux Camélias* is brought back to the theatre, decade after decade, not by reason of the permanent importance of the author, but by reason of the recurrent aspirations of an ever-growing group of emotional actresses.

The most recent production of *The Lady of the Camellias* in New York was due to the justified ambition of Miss Ethel Barrymore. Miss Barrymore is a very able actress, and deserved to have her hour with this celebrated play.

The one thing which I found both difficult to understand and to forgive, in considering this most recent repetition of *La Dame aux Camélias*, was the tampering with the text that had evidently been commissioned by Miss Barrymore. Assuredly, a very famous piece that dates from 1852 — if deemed worthy of a new appeal to public patronage — should be presented frankly as a play of 1852; and there is no reason whatsoever for disguising its historic date beneath a camouflage of those conventions that have recently become established on Broadway. It is as silly to cut out the soliloquies and the asides from a play of 1852 as it would be senseless to suppress the soliloquies of *Hamlet*.

Mr. Edward Sheldon, in attempting to "improve" the text of an author who is commonly regarded as the foremost French dramatist of the nineteenth century, discarded the great soliloquy of the heroine as she writes her farewell letter to Armand [and this soliloquy will be recalled as the finest passage in the play by anybody who remembers the performance of Modjeska];

he decided to suppress the reappearance of the elder Duval in the midst of the gambling-scene, and transformed this whole third act into a sort of Greenwich Village masquerade; and he enclosed the entire text [in pursuance of the pattern exemplified in his own play, called *Romance*] within the framework of a prologue and an epilogue that accentuated, instead of lessening, the traits of artificiality apparent in the piece itself.

These frantic efforts to disguise an old play as a new play defeated themselves. It would be just as reasonable to require Hamlet to call up Polonius on the telephone, in order to establish a scientific reason for the reading of the famous soliloquy on suicide.—"Is that you, old man? — This is Hamlet,— yes, H-A-M-L-E-T, Prince of Denmark.— I have something on my mind. Here it is — are you listening? —'To be or not to be: — that is the question' . . ."

Any resurrection from the past should be undertaken in a mood which admits a fitting reverence for the conventions of the past; and, though the younger Dumas has been honorably dead for many years, there is no reason why a recent playwright should be commissioned to rewrite the text of one of the most celebrated dramatists of modern times.

XI

HENRI LAVEDAN IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE

Throughout the last three decades, Henri Lavedan, of the French Academy, has been recognized as one of the foremost representatives of contemporary French dramatic authorship; and, though his work is intimately national, he has enjoyed a quite unusual success in the commercial theatre of this country. The first of his plays to be presented in America was *Catherine*, which was produced by Annie Russell in 1898. Otis Skinner produced *The Duel* in 1906, and *Sire* in 1911. In 1918, Mrs. Fiske presented *Service*, and the latest item on the list, *The Marquis de Priola*, was added in 1919 by Leo Ditrichstein. Of these five plays, three have run for not less than an entire season in this country, and the others have been played for many weeks. What is the reason for this remarkable success of M. Lavedan with a theatre-going public that rejects so many European dramatists of even larger reputation on the ground that they are "foreign," and therefore not immediately comprehensible?

The reason is that Henri Lavedan is to be admired mainly as a painter of portraits. His greatest gift is his ability to delineate a character that is original in concept and vividly alive in execution. This is the

sort of character that every actor likes to play; and the significant fact should be remarked that each American production of a piece by M. Lavedan has been brought about by the personal desire of some prominent performer to depict the leading part. A playwright who can devise attractive acting parts,— like The Lady of the Camellias, for example,— stands a better chance of extensive success upon the boards than a more momentous dramatist who creates important characters that are true enough to life but not alluring to succeeding generations of actresses and actors. The *dramatis personæ* of M. Lavedan are notable in equal measure as portraits and as parts, as characters and also as characterizations. They are sufficiently true to life to be admired by those commentative men of letters who, when they attack the theatre, may be described as "undramatic" critics; and, at the same time, they are sufficiently theatrical to inspire many actors with a keen desire to portray them.

Among his *confrères* of the French Academy, Henri Lavedan is recognized not only for his prime ability as a portrait-painter, but also for the literary ease and brilliance of his dialogue, and furthermore for his sincerity and earnestness as an almost homiletic moralist. His writing is particularly rich in that quality of sprightliness which the French call *esprit;* and, indeed, he first attracted attention, in the years of his apprenticeship, by publishing, in various journals and reviews, a series of little dialogues of which the most obvious merit was their literary liveliness. But, of course, this special quality is necessarily diluted by the

process of translation; and whatever residue may still remain is more than likely to fall upon deaf ears in a Broadway auditorium.

On the other hand, the American public is, no doubt, unconsciously attracted by the fact that M. Lavedan is more sincerely and emphatically "moral" in his work than any other of his French contemporaries, with the single exception of Eugène Brieux. The moral conscience of M. Brieux is social; he puts society, so to speak, on trial, and reads it a reverberating sentence from the judge's bench; but the moral conscience of M. Lavedan is individual; he creates a living villain, and then condemns him to his just deserts by fighting against him fairly and disarming him. In this respect, his method is similar to that of one of the most honorable authors of our recent English drama; and it would not be at all beside the mark to describe M. Lavedan as the French equivalent of Henry Arthur Jones. Alexandre Dumas *fils*, who — like Lavedan and Jones — was both a playwright and a moralist, once said that a drama should set forth "a painting, an ideal, a judgment." Henri Lavedan fulfils this formula with ease. He is, first and foremost, a great painter; he never loses sight of the ideal, even though his primary employment at the moment may be directed toward depicting its reverse; and he is always ready with a judgment that shall be sufficiently impressive to satisfy the most exacting moralist among his auditors.

The Marquis de Priola, which was first produced at the Théâtre Français in 1902, with the great actor Le Bargy in the title rôle, is regarded by French critics

as one of the three greatest plays of Henri Lavedan, the other two being *Le Prince d'Aurec* (1892) and *Le Nouveau Jeu* (1898); and the American public is deeply indebted to Leo Ditrichstein for the privilege of witnessing so fine a composition in our commercial theatre.

It is easy enough to see that the main motive which impelled Mr. Ditrichstein to produce the play was his desire to appear before the public in the part created by Le Bargy, nearly twenty years ago. This desire was natural; and the ambition of Mr. Ditrichstein has been justified by the result. The present commentator has enjoyed the privilege of seeing both performances. Le Bargy's creation showed more levity than Mr. Ditrichstein's; but Mr. Ditrichstein excels his earlier competitor in grim sardonical intensity. Le Bargy was more witty, more suave, more graceful, and more brilliant; but Mr. Ditrichstein is more horribly repellent in the passages of tragic retribution.

The sinister figure of the Marquis de Priola is one of those great acting parts which are destined to keep a play upon the boards recurrently because of their appeal to the natural ambitions of actor after actor. In this respect, the character is similar in quality to that of the Baron Chevrial, which was made forever famous on our stage by Richard Mansfield, though this fascinating part appeared in a conventional and easily forgotten play by Octave Feuillet, entitled *A Parisian Romance*. Leo Ditrichstein is not, by any means, another Richard Mansfield; but, in depicting the Marquis de Priola, he approaches much more nearly the high point set by Mansfield for this eccentric kind

of characterization than any other actor who has trod our stage since Richard Mansfield died.

In *The Marquis de Priola*, M. Lavedan, according to his custom, has set forth "a painting, an ideal, and a judgment." The painting is a portrait of a man so absolutely wicked that his own creator felt constrained to account for his obliquity of character as an inheritance from a long line of malevolent progenitors dating from the Renaissance. This Marquis — to state the matter seriously in a phrase that is popularly current in American slang — is a devil among women. By his very nature, he has been heart-free from his birth; and his experience has merely hardened him to a mood of philosophic cynicism. Though actuated evermore by the inherited instinct of the moth to flutter wings against a flame, he has escaped from the singeing of innumerable candles by his implanted ability to laugh aloud at a moment a little antecedent to the point when his adventures turn to tragedy.

This is the "painting" that is hung up for inspection in *The Marquis de Priola*. The "ideal" is suggested by the process of negation. The author easily persuades us that his own ideal of manhood is at all points antithetic to this tremendous monument of evil that is permitted to strut and fret its hour on the stage. Through the medium of a fresh and pure young mind — the mind of Pierre Morain, a foster-son of the Marquis de Priola, who turns out later to be his natural son — we are permitted to observe the Marquis as this incarnate devil really looks to Lavedan himself.

The plot of the play is planned for the purpose of

exhibiting the great philanderer in action; and the public is permitted, so to speak, to look and listen through a keyhole while the Marquis simultaneously carries on his elaborate efforts to subjugate three women of three very different types,— one of whom is his former wife, now comfortably married to another husband. In the end, the Marquis is defeated by the very intricacy of his own devices.

The " judgment " comes when the Marquis de Priola is punished, after due forewarning, with paralysis, as an inescapable result of his past carelessness of the laws of reasonable living. No finer feat of physical acting has been shown upon our stage for many years than the histrionic moment when Mr. Ditrichstein is stricken tumbling to the floor at the conclusion of this play. This great moment, also, is foreshadowed finely, at the conclusion of the penultimate act, when the Marquis is suddenly afflicted with a partial and premonitory paralysis of the right arm, which ever afterwards hangs limp and shrunken from the shoulder of the actor. Mr. Ditrichstein has depicted these effects with such extreme adroitness that his performance, while detracting not at all from the moral purpose of the author, persuades us to applaud the wicked Marquis for his consistent villainy until the bitter end, and for his gallantry displayed in a last and losing battle against the inevitable sentence of moral retribution.

XII

A DRAMA FOR ADULTS

"The Torches" by Henry Bataille

There is ample evidence that man must be, by nature, a theatre-going animal. Otherwise, it would be impossible to account for the apparent prosperity of the theatres in New York at a time when scarcely any plays are being shown which are worthy of an hour's attention from adults of intelligence and taste. Cultivated people who have climbed to years of discretion do not waste their time in the consideration of bad music, bad painting, bad sculpture, or bad architecture; but there always seems to be a public for bad plays. The passion for going to the theatre must be written down as irresistible, like the love of woman or that other weak and amiable habit of wasting time and money. In seasons when the plays are meritorious, the public enjoys a sense of satisfaction; but, in seasons when the plays are unendurable, the public attends the theatre none the less. From this curious phenomenon, we might deduce a proverb that the next thing most desirable to a good play is a bad play, and that the only absolute negation to the theatre-going impulse would be no play at all.

An English version of *Les Flambeaux,* by Henry Bataille, was produced by Mr. Lester Lonergan on the

evening of Wednesday, October 24th, 1917. By exact count, this was the fortieth "legitimate" play presented for the first time in New York during the course of that particular season; and it was the first of all the forty that seem to have been written by a grown-up man for the enjoyment of a grown-up audience. All the others might have been appreciated easily by children, or by adults lacking both intelligence and education. Our theatre, for the most part, has ceased to be a grown-up institution; and whatever ideas it ventures to convey are commonly expressed in words of one syllable.

Among the playwrights of contemporary France, M. Bataille may be regarded as the eighth or ninth in the order of importance. Assuredly, he does not rank more loftily than that among his colleagues; and, before the first production of *Les Flambeaux* in 1912, he did not even rank so high,— since the late Paul Hervieu was living at that time, to push him further down the ladder. Yet *The Torches* puts our native dramatists to shame, and makes our American drama seem childish in comparison. Like all French playwrights, M. Bataille pays his auditors the compliment of asking them to think. It goes without saying that he is, himself, endowed with brains; for it takes brains to make a practicable play, however empty it may be of permanent significance, and even our American playwrights are not devoid of the ability to think. The point at which M. Bataille surpasses our native dramatists is merely this: — he expects his audience, also, to be endowed with brains. In these times of storm and

stress, no soap-box demagogue would dare to stand up and assert in public that Americans, in general, are under-educated and deficient in intelligence. Yet, week after week, the patrons of our theatre are insulted, in these very terms, by a drama which vociferously claims to set before the public "what the public wants." M. Bataille is not so temerarious. He does not venture to insult his public. But then, of course, his public is composed of Frenchmen,— who when insulted, rise and say, "They shall not pass!"

When a man calls in a doctor, he expects to be told something more about his liver than he knows already; when a man retains a lawyer, he expects to be told something more about the laws of contract or the laws of divorce than he knows already; and, when a man pays money to a dramatist, he has a right to be told something more about life than he has previously known. Why should any person pay five dollars for a pair of tickets to the theatre, if he is doomed to suffer from a sense that he knows as much, or more, about the phase of life that is discussed as the dramatist himself? The only real excuse for the existence of an author — in the theatre, and in the library as well — is that he can tell us something that we want to know, or make us think of something that would never have occurred to us except for the stimulating contact between his mind and ours. Speaking merely as a layman — and not at all as a critic or a playwright — I must confess that the main motive which attracts me to the theatre — night after night, for weeks and months and years — is the constant hope of taking off my hat

to some invisible brain behind the footlights that has thought and said something about life which my own mind, unassisted by the dramatist, could never possibly have thought and said. We go to the theatre — and this is particularly true of critics — not to teach but to learn; not to assert our own knowledge or experience, but to attend to the testimony of an author who is able to contribute to our education. Mr. Christopher Mathewson could hardly be expected to listen patiently to a lengthy lecture on the craft of baseball delivered by that imaginary "bush-league" pitcher whose living semblance has been drawn in the delightful sketches of Mr. Ring W. Lardner; but is there any greater reason why an educated man should listen patiently to a homily on life composed — let us say — by Mr. George V. Hobart, the author of that popular monstrosity, *Experience?* If our theatre has no mind to set before us that is obviously wiser than our own,— why, in heaven's name, should our educated public continue to pay money for the privilege of going to the theatre?

M. Henry Bataille had something to say in *Les Flambeaux;* and this something is discussed very clearly in an eloquent passage of the second act. This passage records a confidential conversation between two great and memorable characters. We are not merely told that these characters are noted men; but we recognize them to be great, because of the nature and the quality of the thoughts which they exchange. One of them is a Belgian poet, named Hernert, who has been offered the Nobel Prize, but has waived it in favor of a

French scientist, named Bouguet, who has recently isolated and conquered the bacillus of cancer. Hernert expounds to Bouguet his philosophy of life and explains his reason for renouncing the great prize in favor of his colleague. Life — according to this hypothetic Belgian poet, whose traits of mind may possibly have been suggested by Verhaeren — is lived on three planes,— the sensational, the emotional, and the intellectual. He attributes his own ascension,— from the first plane, through the second, to the third,— to a reading, at the age of thirty, of the scientific writings of Bouguet. But, when Hernert has paid this humble tribute to the unadulterated reason of Bouguet, the scientist reacts with a counter-confession that, in his own experience, he has recently discovered and resisted a potent tendency to descend from the plane of intellect, through the plane of emotion, to the plane of mere sensation.— In the American theatre, it is, indeed, a rare experience to listen to a colloquy between two characters, each of whom knows more and says more about life in general than has ever yet been thought by the casual and careless auditor.

The story of *The Torches* discusses the difficulties encountered by Bouguet in his effort to conduct his personal and private life upon the lofty plane of pure intelligence. He is a great and famous scientist; and, in intellect, he easily transcends the average man. Yet, this very superior intelligence is continually subject to assaults from suppressed emotions and inhibited sensations which a more commonplace and ordinary man would be able easily to master. Bouguet — be-

cause of his intelligent ambition to live forever in the region of pure reason — is easily betrayed to error by those functions of the mind which are by no means reasonable. He is led by his sensations into sin, and by his emotions into perfidy; and his unadulterated intellect is subsequently impotent to harmonize his actual experience with his ideals.

Bouguet — in the story of *The Torches* — commits a momentary sin of sex and subsequently suffers for it; although this passing madness has not, in any way, assailed the integrity of his intelligence. Because of one unthinking hour, in a lifetime of half a century devoted to the high pursuit of science and the benefaction of mankind, Bouguet is challenged to a duel and wounded mortally in the consequent encounter. But, before he dies, he manages to extract from his impetuous assailant a solemn oath to carry on his uncompleted scientific work, in order that humanity at large may not be made to suffer from the deep damnation of his taking-off.

M. Bataille apparently agrees with Dante that a sin of mere sensation is, after all, a minor matter for a man whose sheer integrity of spirit has not been scotched by this momentary, unpremediated abnegation. This is a thesis that deserves most careful pondering by modern moralists. Whatever may be said by a dramatic author on this topic is worthy of considerate evaluation by any auditor who is adult, and is not " yet to learn the alphabet of man."

It goes without saying that *The Torches* is a well-made play. M. Bataille is a disciple of Alexandre

Dumas *fils*, and has inherited that fine technique which, first formulated a century ago by Eugène Scribe, has been improved by generation after generation of French dramatists. The French are a clear-minded people, and see things as they are. It is a cardinal principle of their criticism that any work worth doing is worth doing well. They expect an artist to learn his craft, and to revere the tools of his trade that have been handed down to him by the great artists of the past. They hold these truths to be self-evident: — that the drama should be dramatic, that the theatre should be theatrical, and that all art should be artistic. The technical merits of a play like *Les Flambeaux* are, in consequence, beyond discussion.

XIII

LE THÉÂTRE DU VIEUX COLOMBIER

In the now-forgotten period before the war, not even the most civilized of nations escaped entirely that taint of decadence which comes from long-protracted leisure and a consequent excess of lassitude. In France, the flag of art had been nailed to the mast for many centuries; but it began at last to droop, and to seem a little sullied, when no vivifying wind had blown upon it for more than forty years. Paris was becoming wearied of its own distinction, as the citadel of "those who know." Even the French theatre, which had led the world since 1830, was beginning to grow dull.

Something had gone wrong with France, and with the world at large. The wreaths that decked the statue of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde had almost begun to shrivel up and be forgotten; and then. . . .

But we are talking now of the time before the war, and of the condition of the French stage in a period of leisure and of lassitude. The theatres of Paris — unbelievable as it might seem — had almost descended to the level of the tedious. There were two reasons for this sad condition,— two antithetic tendencies which account, together, for the dearth of living drama in the somnolent and easy-going Paris of the light and laughing years before the war.

In the first place, more than half the energy that was expended in the French theatres of the time was devoted merely to a meaningless continuance of the traditions of the past; and, in the second place, the only relief from this incubus of ponderous conventionality was offered by a wild and whirling group of anarchists and "lesser breeds without the Law." French art — to talk in terms of politics — was languishing between a formal past of Louis Quatorze and a formless future of the Bolsheviki,— between an over-emphasized respect for Law and an exaggerated tendency to take a gambling chance on Lawlessness. Hence, those mixed and indigestible *Salons* of painting and of sculpture, which seemed bewildering at the passing moment, but which are easy enough to understand in retrospect today.

In that recent but now-superseded period, when the great art of the drama seemed destined either to die of old-age or to perish still-born in expectancy, an ambitious actor by the name of Jacques Copeau decided to establish a little, unpretentious theatre which should seek to light a vivid torch from the dying embers of the inspiration of the past. M. Copeau was neither a Reactionary nor an Anarchist: he was merely a lover of the maxim that Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty: and he had a vivid feeling that there is nothing either new or old in that eternal region where Truth and Beauty join hands and dance together, to the music of melodies unheard.

M. Copeau assembled a little group of coöperative actors and founded a new theatre in Paris on October

22, 1913. This theatre took its title from that medieval street in the Quartier Latin, leading somewhat vaguely westward from the Place de Saint Sulpice, which might be named, in English, the Alley of the Ancient Dove-cot. Between October 22, 1913, and May 31, 1914, more than three hundred performances of fourteen plays, both classical and modern, were exhibited, to ever-growing audiences, at Le Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. Among the many authors represented were Shakespeare, Molière, Thomas Heywood, Alfred de Musset, Dostoyevsky, Paul Claudel, and Henri Becque. Before the end of his first season, M. Copeau had received "golden encomiums" from Eleanora Duse, Igor Strawinsky, Claude Debussy, Henri Bergson, Paul Claudel, Èmile Verhaeren, and many other leaders of the art-life of Europe. In the spring of 1914, M. Copeau was regarded, by the court of last resort, as the *régisseur* of one of the few theatres in the world which manifestly seemed alive.

The principles of Jacques Copeau were very simple. He was neither a Reactionary nor an Anarchist. He neither respected the past for the insufficient season that it was the past nor revered the future for the insufficient reason that it was the future. He freed his mind at once from traditions and from fads, and devoted his attention to the lofty task of "drawing the Thing as he saw It for the God of Things as They Are." One theory he clung to, absolutely: — that the drama is essentially an art of authorship, and that the purpose of the theatre is to recreate and to project the mood and purpose of the dramatist. In adhering to

this theory M. Copeau seceded not only from the immemorial tradition of the Comédie Française, which sets the actor higher than the author, but seceded also from the heresy of Mr. Gordon Craig, by which the actor is suppressed in order that the decorator may be almost deified. M. Copeau has little use for scenery or decoration. He does not believe, like Mr. Craig, that the drama is essentially a pattern of lines and lights and colors. Neither does he believe, like Mr. David Belasco, that the drama is a mere accumulated and assorted hodge-podge of properties and accessories. He believes that the *idea* of the dramatist is the only thing that counts, and that this idea may be rendered lovingly — without extraneous assistance — by an eager company of coöperative actors.

In the gospel of M. Copeau, "the play's the thing," and the purpose of the acting is to vivify and recreate the play. This gospel — simple as it seems — appeared exceptional in Paris in the year before the war; for, at that time, the reactionaries claimed that acting was the thing, and the anarchistic revolutionaries claimed that decoration was the thing. Between the shade of Talma and the shadow of Gordon Craig, the theatre was obfuscated by a twilight that was doubly deep. Then came M. Copeau, with his very simple *dictum:* — Molière wrote plays intended to be acted; Molière acted plays intended to be seen; therefore, the only purpose of the theatre is to convey, through the fluent medium of acting, the creative purpose of the author. Decoration, after all, is nothing more than

decoration. The idea of the play is the only thing that is eternal.

With this formula, M. Copeau succeeded; and, before the advent of the month of May in 1914, Le Théâtre du Vieux Colombier was already known and celebrated throughout Europe. Shakespeare, Molière, and a dozen other dramatists were enjoying, once again, a vivid life in the Alley of the Ancient Dovecot. Then fell the war. . . .

Most of the actors were immediately mobilized. The theatre ceased to be. For many months, it seemed that Art itself was being shelled and shattered by the Hun, together with that symbol of all that is, in art, most Christian and most sacred,— the church of Joan of Arc,— *la cathédrale de Rheims*. *Le patron du Vieux Colombier* was — like Othello — a hero with an occupation gone. This artist of the stage — a man of more than military years — was suddenly divested of his theatre, or, in other words, his spiritual home. What was he to do? . . . The question was answered by the Minister of Fine Arts, who advised him to come to the United States, in order to deliver a series of *discours*.

In the now-forgotten days when this country still pretended to be "neutral" between Right and Wrong, many emissaries were sent over to our shores by the antithetic nations. The Germans and the Austrians sent over a small army of assassins, bomb-planters, artists in arson, and inciters to *sabotage*. The French sent over Jusserand, Brieux, and many other gentlemen instructed to do nothing and to say nothing, but

to leave us quite religiously alone until we had had time to consult our own underlying conscience. Brieux, when he landed in New York in the fall of 1914, said to the reporters: —"I am coming as an emissary from the French Academy to the American Academy; I am coming from a free people who can think to a kindred free people who can think; and, so long as I enjoy your hospitality, I shall say no word about the war."

Jacques Copeau, when he first came to America in 1917, was similarly tactful. He talked to us of art and Molière, and said no word about the war. We know, now, that France was bleeding at the time; but this artist — sent over by his government — talked to us only about Truth and Beauty,— eternal matters, in the midst of many things succumbing momentarily to death. We welcomed Jacques Copeau,— because he wore the face of Dante, because he had the voice and the demeanor of one "having authority," because of any of a multitude of reasons that are trivial and real. We asked him, naturally, to remain among us; and this request was backed by a guaranteed subscription, collected in support of the occasion by Mr. Otto Kahn and some of his associates in the directorate of the Metropolitan Opera House.

In consequence of this support from a friendly nation overseas, the French Government was easily persuaded to encourage a transference of Le Théâtre du Vieux Colombier from Paris to New York. Such actors of the company originally chosen by M. Copeau as had not already been killed in action were demobilized, for the specific purpose of carrying the torch of

art from Paris to New York; and a reconstituted theatre, wearing as a sort of proud *panache* the name of Le Vieux Colombier, was sent overseas as an item of friendly and disinterested propaganda.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kahn and his associates had leased the old Garrick Theatre and caused the auditorium to be entirely rebuilt and redecorated in conformity with the desires of M. Copeau. This new edifice became as pleasing to the eye as any theatre-building in America. The old top-gallery was discarded, the boxes were removed from the proscenium to the rear of the auditorium, and the gilt and tinsel of Broadway were replaced by the lath and plaster of the sixteenth century. The interior became remarkable for its simplicity and quietude of tone, and suggested a sense of medieval innyards in Warwick or Beauvais.

The stage of the Vieux Colombier, as planned by Jasques Copeau, more nearly resembles the stage of Shakespeare than the stage of Molière. Before the curtain, there is of course an "apron" devoid of footlights, which is accessible from either hand through a couple of proscenium doors. Behind the curtain, the main stage is spacious, free, and unencumbered. No scenery — in the Belasco sense — is ever used upon it; but sometimes the stage is developed to two levels by the introduction of an elevated platform, about five feet high, which is accessible by steps from every side; and sometimes the acting-space is contracted with enclosing screens or curtains and localized by the introduction of certain set-pieces of "property." At the rear of the stage, there is a balcony, borne aloft by

columns, which may be used, when needed, as the "upper room" of Shakespeare or, when not needed, may be curtained off by an "arras" and employed merely as a decorative background. This free and easy stage may be entered from any angle and from a multitude of levels. As in the Globe Theatre on the Bankside, the main purpose is to get the actor on and to allow him to deliver the lines of the author. The lighting, of course, comes entirely from overhead, like the natural sunlight of Shakespeare.

The "fluency" of this neo-Elizabethan stage [for "fluency," I think, is the only word that is appropriate] was amply illustrated at the opening performance, on November 27, 1917, when *Les Fourberies de Scapin* was offered as the *pièce de résistance.* This farce, though written so late as 1671, represented a return to the earlier manner of Molière, inherited from the acrobatic antics of the Italian *commedia del arte.* The scene is said to be a public square in Naples; and Molière, no doubt, used the fixed set that is summarized and still exemplified to students of the stage in the theatre of Palladio at Vicenza. But M. Copeau thinks rightly that the scene is really any public place accessible from all sides by actors unimpeded by an obligation to account for their exits and their entrances. He projects the piece upon two levels,— before, beside, beyond, and [more especially] atop, the portable platform with which he is enabled to adorn — as by a plinth of statuary — an otherwise empty and unfocussed stage.

M. Copeau's performance of Scapin may be described

as a reminiscence and a revelation. It showed the acrobatic grace and rhythmic, keen agility that have been ascribed by history to Molière's own teacher,—that immortal Scaramouche who came from Italy to Paris to remind the modern world of the grandeur that was Rome. Plautus seemed alive again when this actor snaked and floated through his many *fourberies*, and belabored the minds or bodies of his victims with literal or figurative slap-sticks. M. Copeau was ably aided by M. Louis Jouvet, who projected a memorable character-performance in the *rôle* of old *Géronte*. Jouvet's bewildered repetition of the famous line, "*Mais que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*," is a thing to be remembered always and laid away in lavender, together with one's memories of the greater and the lesser Coquelin. The rest of the company was adequate to the occasion. M. Copeau has organized a group of players who have learned to speak and learned to act and learned a proper reverence for the authors who have written down the lines assigned to them.

As an induction to this inaugural performance of *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, M. Copeau composed an *Impromptu du Vieux Colombier*, which was modeled on the *Impromptu de Versailles*, and which repeated many of the most pertinent comments on the art of acting which were made, in 1663, by Molière himself. This playful skit served the purpose of introducing quite informally to the American public the associated actors of the company. One passage was especially noteworthy, because it summarized in a few words the attitude of those who came to us from France toward the cataclysm

which, at that time, overwhelmed the world. A young actor, fresh from the trenches, M. Lucien Weber, said to the Director,—"*Il faut aussi nous laisser le temps, Patron, de nous ressaisir, d'écarter de nos yeux des images trop affreuses.— Moi, je suis de Rheims. . . .;*" and M. Copeau replied,—"*Ces images, mes amis, ne les écartez pas de vos yeux. Il faut qu'elles nous inspirent. Mais gardons-les secrètes. Nous n'exploiterons jamais des émotions sacrées. Nous ne parlerons pas de nos souffrances. Nous ne déploierons pas sur une scène de théâtre le drapeau des combats. Nous ne chanterons pas d'hymne querrier. Nous ne ferons pas applaudir un acteur sous l'uniforme bleu. Celui qui représente ici la France, qui est l'ami de Ronsard, de Shakespeare et de tous nos vieux auteurs, nous a donné l'exemple de la délicatesse et de la dignité. Mais dans toutes nos actions, dans tous nos gestes, dans la moindre intonation du beau language qu'il nous est donné de parler, nous tâcherons d'être reconnus pour de véritables Français. . . .*"

XIV

ALFRED DE MUSSET IN THE THEATRE

Alfred de Musset once wrote a little poem in which he expressed a wish that, in due time, he might be buried beneath a weeping willow tree. I have forgotten the text of this poem; but I remember that it is inscribed upon the rather ugly monument that marks his grave in Père-Lachaise. Over this unpretentious tomb-stone there hangs — or used to hang — a lonely branch of willow,— the languid offshoot of a sapling planted by some pious hand. I remember being struck by the incongruity between the verses, carved in rock, and the sickly little tree that drooped forlornly over them.

This impression dates from twenty years ago; for, at the age of seventeen, I renounced the youthful habit of visiting the graves of the great. [It must have been about that time that I read R. L. S. on *Old Mortality*.] But now the thought occurs to me that the sculptured verses may be taken as a symbol of the permanent fame of de Musset as a poet, and the struggling willow branch may be regarded as a symbol of his slender but still-growing reputation as a dramatist. Perhaps some later traveler can tell me if the simile may be developed even further. That nearly leafless sapling which made me smile, a score of years ago, may now —

for aught I know — be grown into a healthy and promising young tree. In that event, the fanciful comparison would be perfected; for the fame of de Musset as a playwright has steadily increased in recent years.

In the history of all the arts except the drama, the posthumous achievement of a noble reputation is not at all unusual. Many painters, many sculptors, neglected in their life-time and derided by their own contemporaries, have subsequently come to be regarded as men whose only failing was that they were doomed to work on earth before their time. So recent a painter as Jean François Millet lived in penury while he was making canvases that now are sold at auction for a hundred thousand dollars. The painter and the sculptor manufacture objects that are durable, and may appeal to the leisurely consideration of posterity. Their merit is finally evaluated by that small but perpetual minority composed of " those who know,"— a minority that may summon but a few votes in any single generation but that triumphs ultimately by an undisrupted repetition of its verdict throughout the tireless succession of the centuries.

The history of literature has been enriched by many similar instances of men who, scorned by their contemporaries, have been accepted as apostles by posterity. A notable example is afforded by the case of Keats. This man was absolutely honest; and when, upon his death-bed, he requested Joseph Severn to inscribe upon his tombstone the pathetic legend, " Here lies one whose name was writ in water," he believed exactly what he said. His poems had been appreciated

only by the inner circle of his friends; even by this inner circle he had been regarded mainly as a promising disciple of Leigh Hunt; and to the general public he had merely been made known as a butt for the sarcastic and heavy-handed ridicule of Lockhart and Wilson. His short life seemed a failure, and he died a disappointed man. Yet now — one hundred years after the publication of his faulty and faltering first volume — Keats is commonly regarded as one of the very greatest of all poets in the English language and one of the very few important apostles to the modern world.

It is only in the domain of the drama that these drastic reversals of an adverse contemporary verdict are so rare as to seem almost absolutely negligible. As a general rule [but rules, of course, are always open to exceptions] it may safely be asserted that a playwright who has failed to please his own contemporaries can scarcely hope to attract the patronage of posterity. The reason is, of course, that the drama is a democratic art. It succeeds or fails by a *plebiscite* of the immediate, untutored public, instead of by a vote delivered by the small but self-perpetuant minority composed of "those who know." A book may keep itself alive, if only a single printed copy chances to avoid the iniquity of sheer oblivion and happens, in some future century, to fall into the hands of an appreciative critic; but it is very difficult, at any time, to persuade a theatre-manager to reproduce a play that failed to interest the theatre-going public in the very year when it was first produced. The exercise of any art — as R. L. S. has told us — is nothing but

the playing of a game; and the game of the dramatist is to interest the public of his time, assembled in the theatre of his time, in the predetermined antics of the actors of his time. The playwright — because of the conditions of his craft — is required to appeal to the immediate many, instead of the ultimate few; and his efforts to interest a helter-skelter audience must stand or fall by the democratic verdict of the public toward which he has directed his immediate appeal.

Such representative great dramatists as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, and Ibsen succeeded amply in attracting the applause of their immediate contemporaries and thereby laid the basis for the favor that has been bestowed upon them by succeeding generations. Their plays are still produced by commercial-minded managers, because the fact has been established that there is a public willing to patronize them. On the other hand, there is nothing — in the general domain of art — more difficult to resurrect than a play that once has died in the presence of a gathered audience.

Volumes and volumes of testimony might easily be drawn upon to support the thesis that dramatic art cannot appeal to the verdict of posterity; but one exception to this reasonable rule of criticism is obtruded by the plays of Alfred de Musset. This author was regarded justly in his life-time as one of the supreme triumvirate that led the renascence of French poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century; but he received no recognition whatsoever as a writer for the stage. It is only since his death that de Musset has been at all respected as a dramatist.

His career, in relation to the theatre, is so exceptional that it calls for recapitulation. Alfred de Musset was born in Paris in 1810. His first play, *La Nuit Vénitienne*, was offered at the Odéon in 1830, the very year of Victor Hugo's epoch-making *Hernani*. It will be noted that de Musset was, at that time, less than twenty-one years old. This fledgeling effort was a failure; and the author, disgusted with the theatre, refused thereafter to write pieces for the stage. This petulant renunciation reminds us now of Dante's famous phrase, "the great refusal"; for there is no longer any doubt that de Musset, if he had chosen to take the theatre seriously, might easily have rivaled the popularity of Hugo with the contemporary public. He continued to compose in the dramatic form, because of a necessity of his nature; but, instead of offering his pieces for production, he printed them successively in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. While Hugo was writing clap-trap melodramas, disguised as literature by the flowing garment of his gorgeous verse, de Musset was writing, in neat and nimble prose, fantastic comedies conceived in an unprecedented mood of witty and romantic playfulness. These pieces, as they appeared in print, were regarded by contemporary readers merely as vacationary exercises by a writer whose more serious medium was verse. The reading public tolerated these relaxations of a noble mind; but it never occurred to any critic that de Musset's printed comedies might possibly be actable. The author did not care. He hated *Hernani*, and despised the *Antony* of old Dumas; and he had a happy time composing little

pieces for a theatre that existed only in his own imagination.

It was in 1833 that de Musset became involved in his famous affair with Georges Sand. Their trip to Italy took place in December of that year, and lasted till April, 1834, when de Musset returned to Paris. His final rupture with the famous female novelist took place in 1835. It was precisely at this period — and, for the most part, during the Italian tour — that de Musset wrote nearly all the comedies composed for the theatre of his dreams. Even as a closet-dramatist [if a critic of the living theatre can stoop to use that hated, self-defeating word], de Musset's work was finished for all time when he was scarcely twenty-six years old. It is only fair, in any posthumous appraisement, to remember that the comedies of Alfred de Musset were written not only for a non-existent theatre but written also by a young man in his early twenties.

The poet lived till 1857, when he was forty-seven years of age; and, before he died, the theatre of his time began to find him out. His one-act play, *Caprice*, was the first of all his comedies since *La Nuit Vénitienne* that was acted in his life-time. It was first presented, far away from France, in the French theatre of Petrograd; and its success was so striking that the piece was soon re-imported to Paris by Madame Allan. This was in November, 1847,— nearly fifteen years after *Caprice* had been composed. Within the next four seasons, the poet witnessed the production of half a dozen of his other plays in Paris; and, subsequent to his death, his career as a contributor to the current

theatre was continued. *On ne Badine pas avec l'Amour* — which has remained in the repertory of the Comédie Française — was first produced in 1861. *Barberine* — which was acted in New York in 1918 by the company of Le Vieux Colombier — was not presented for the first time till 1882,— nearly half a century later than the period in which it was composed.

The biography of *Barberine* is unique in the history of the theatre. This piece was written, in his early twenties, by a man who had retired from the theatre before the date of his majority and was almost totally unknown to his contemporaries as a dramatist. It was acted for the first time fifty years after it was written and twenty-five years after the author had been laid away in his resting grave. Yet in 1918 — when de Musset, to count the ticking of the clock exactly, was one hundred and eighteen years of age — *Barberine* pleased many English-speaking people in a city half the world away from Paris. To students of the theatre, the record of this fragile, unpretentious play is more remarkable, in many ways, than that of *Hamlet*. That sickly little willow-wand in Père-Lachaise need no longer weep and wither: a breeze is blowing from the west to cause its leaves to overturn their silver sides in a ripple of delighted laughter.

Barberine is delicately entertaining; and the appeal that it makes to the æsthetic sensibilities is representative of the appeal that is inherent in all the comedies composed by Alfred de Musset. Disdaining the theatre of his time, this poet understood more clearly than the celebrated author of the *Preface to "Cromwell"* the

meaning and the method of the comedies of Shakespeare. Alone among all modern playwrights, he has recaptured and restored the magic atmosphere of the Forest of Arden,— an atmosphere which marries to identity the usually antithetic moods of loveliness and wit. He flutes a little melody upon a slender reed; but this music wakens echoes from an organ which resounds with the diapason of eternity.

The story of *Barberine* is suggestive of any of the hundred tales of Boccaccio, which date from a period when narrative was naïve and had not yet become self-conscious and sophisticated. Count Ulric is married to a perfect wife. A dashing, attractive, and self-conceited youth — Astolphe de Rosenberg — makes a bet with Ulric that he can seduce the later's wife while her husband is away from home; and the laying of this wager is witnessed by the Queen of Hungary. The Baron Rosenberg goes to the castle of Count Ulric, secures admittance as a guest, and tries his arts against the Countess Barberine; but he is unexpectedly repulsed by the clever Countess and locked up in a room to which both food and water are denied except upon condition that Rosenberg shall devote his entire time, without remission, to the woman's work of spinning. In this ridiculous predicament, the incarcerated Baron is discovered ultimately by Count Ulric and by the gracious Queen of Hungary.

This is a story of the sort that — according to our modern standards — may be described as a tale intended to be written in words of one syllable. But the author has embroidered it with many interesting

corollaries and has told it with an art that is reminiscent of that sudden and surprising wisdom which comes occasionally from the mouths of babes. The whole play is so child-like, yet so utterly delightful, that it makes us fumble for a reason to explain the purpose of the manifest complexity of the majority of modern dramas.

Most of de Musset's plays provoke a similar response. Their merit is so simple and so obvious that it remained unrecognized for half a century. It was deemed impracticable to expect a gathered public to enjoy a sort of day-dream that a poet had narrated to himself in a mood of self-enjoyment. The tardy and almost accidental discovery of the fact that the fantastic comedies of Alfred de Musset are stageworthy, after all, is an incident unparalleled elsewhere in the whole history of dramatic literature.

XV

IN PRAISE OF PUPPET-THEATRES

Tony Sarg

Life in New York is more fleet-winged and transitory than life in any other city; and natives of New York who are less than forty years of age can look back to a now-departed period with that luxury of reminiscence that comes only, under usual conditions, to people who have passed the traditional threescore and ten.

Twenty years ago, or thereabouts, there used to stand in Spring Street, a little westward from the Bowery, an Italian puppet-theatre that was eagerly frequented by enthusiastic newsboys; and, just around the corner in Elizabeth Street, a little to the northward, there was another puppet-theatre, up a flight or two of stairs, which also carried on a high tradition inherited from medieval Italy. In those days, it used to be a great delight for a native of New York to go down to "Little Italy" and spend an evening with the animated dolls. The present writer used to be a welcome guest at both these institutions; and, in the Spring Street theatre, he served, on more than one occasion, as a puppeteer.

In these Italian puppet-theatres a continuous tale

was told, culled mainly from the legends of Carlomagno and his Peers, as chronicled in the immortal epic of Lodovico Ariosto. Each night, as in the Chinese theatre, the story was resumed at the point where it had been relinquished on the night before. The predicted doings for the current date were announced, in advance of the performance, on sudden flaring posters that were set up on the sidewalk. These posters informed the newsboy public that to-night they might be privileged to witness (for three cents or five) the heroic combat between the Christian Knight Tancredo and some mighty Saracen, or else the poetical adventures of the Knight Rinaldo in the bower of the Sorceress Armida. These posters, dear to memory, served to stimulate the appetite of passers-by for the wonders to be shown in the tiny auditorium upstairs, that defied the fire laws and made a little home for Tasso and for Ariosto in a quiet and unnoted corner of New York.

In that now-departed period, I used to go behind and work a puppet now and then, in that stuffy little room in Spring Street. These Italian dolls were rather heavy: they weighed from ninety to a hundred pounds, and a rolling-up of sleeves was necessitated by the task of helping them to go about their business. The puppet-plays of that time were replete with alarums and excursions; and many mortal combats between armored warriors were demanded, night by night, by the limitless scenario. One evening, by accident, I found myself installed upon the back-stage platform as the special puppeteer of the Paynim

Sultan Soliman. This Sultan, according to the previous announcements on the flaring posters, was expected to fight a losing fight against some Christian hero and to "go down scornful" after a gentlemanly effort to assert himself and do his best. But, when the moment came for the big fight that was to cap the climax of the storied evening, I became so interested in the situation that I refused to allow the Sultan Soliman to die. I whacked the Christian hero over the head so hard and so repeatedly that the congregated newsboys out in front rose spontaneously to their feet and began to cheer the villain of the play. The curtain had to be rung down, to restore order in the house; and it could not be rung up again until I had consented, regretfully, to permit my favored Sultan Soliman to receive his death-wound from the hand of the Crusader-hero. After this surrender had been successfully negotiated, the play went on.

In those days, the lines were delivered by a decrepit old Sicilian who knew the stories to his finger-tips and improvised the necessary dialogue to suit the action of the puppets. This man was never at a loss for speech. Hidden from the audience, he used to go down on his knees, and — with his face suffused by smiles or bathed in tears — he used to launch the sort of language that was obviously needed to suit the mood of the occasion. After the evening was over, this eloquent old man, whose very name I have forgotten now, would wander about behind the scenes, where the congregated puppets were dangled upon hooks like so many carcasses in the window of a butcher's shop,

and pat them with affection, and say, as if in confidence, " Next Thursday this fellow will have to kill himself," or " To-morrow night this gentleman is destined to be married to this lady."

Nobody who has really loved the puppet-theatre in his youth can ever quite forget this affection in his later years; and the present writer is ready to confess with frankness a preëstablished disposition to favor any theatre of marionettes. This feeling was accentuated, almost tragically, ten or fifteen years ago, when the Italian puppet-theatres in New York were driven out of business by the advent of the five-cent moving-picture play. The old address in Spring Street was changed, between two winkings of the eye, from a temple of delight where one might muse upon Orlando and the magic blowing of his horn, to a place of commerce where one could only be informed, through the medium of the flittering screen, of the perpetual desire of rich bankers to seduce impoverished stenographers. The present writer — fifteen years ago — stood once upon the curb of Spring Street, in the very midst of a midwinter snow-storm, and figuratively wept at that passing change of fashion which had annihilated a living theatre of marionettes and substituted, at the same address, a lifeless moving-picture show.

Until the outset of 1914, the finest development of the puppet-stage that had taken place in any country was achieved in the celebrated theatre of marionettes in the Ausstellungs-park in Munich. The enterprising Germans had easily surpassed the tradi-

tional Italians in this minor department of artistic activity; and, in 1913, the German puppet-theatre was undeniably the finest in the world.

But the preëminence of the Munich theatre of marionettes has, more recently, been disestablished by the exhibition of Tony Sarg's marionettes in New York. The puppet-theatre that has been invented and developed by Mr. Tony Sarg is unique in the annals of the world. This American artist has expressed more, through the medium of his manikins, than any of his many predecessors. The technical capacity of the inspired dolls of Tony Sarg is unsurpassed and, according to all due prediction, unsurpassable. Their bodily gyrations equal easily the acrobatic antics of any human athletes; and their vocal expression is rendered adequately by a congregation of professional actors.

Each of the three plays disclosed in the course of Tony Sarg's initial program was especially praiseworthy because of its adherence to the atmosphere of make-believe that is most to be desired in a theatre of marionettes. *The Three Wishes* was adapted from an ancient puppet-play by F. Pocci; and *The Green Suit* and *A Stolen Beauty and the Great Jewel*, both of which were written by Hamilton Williamson, were deftly suited to the mood of the occasion. The agile prowess of the animated dolls afforded ample evidence of the activity of half a dozen puppeteers, whose names were duly noted on the program; but the artistry impressed upon the gathered public by the scenery, the

lighting, the narrative invention, and the harmonizing sense of *mise en scène*, must be registered to the account of Mr. Tony Sarg.

XVI

"THE BETROTHAL" OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

It is not often that New York is honored with the privilege of witnessing the first performance in the world of a masterpiece by one of the foremost dramatists of Europe. It was doubtless due mainly to the exigencies of the war that the famous Belgian poet, in the summer of 1918, shipped the latest heir of his invention overseas to be adopted by the American public; but since authors are always tender of their progeny, we may be certain that Maurice Maeterlinck would not have sent his "littlest child" so far away from Ghent and Normandy unless he had known that a kindly foster-father was waiting on the hither side of the Atlantic to receive it. The world-première of *The Blue Bird* took place at Stanislawski's Art Theatre in Moscow. This, also, was a long distance from Belgium and France; but Stanislawski's theatre, at the time, was the most highly regarded in all of Europe. For the privilege of witnessing the world-première of *The Betrothal*, New York is indebted to the respect of the great poet for an American manager, — Winthrop Ames; and Mr. Ames has shown himself worthy, in every way, of the trust imposed upon him.

The Betrothal is a sequel to *The Blue Bird* and constitutes the second canticle in an uncompleted trilogy

of lyric dramas designed to summarize the whole experience of humankind as it is normally unfolded by the quest for those three guerdons that are sought instinctively in human life, at its beginning, at its middle, and at its end. Tyltyl, the hero, represents the human race. In each of the plays, he fares forth on a journey through the present, past, and future — imagined as three mystic notes that sing together into the single chord of eternity — in search of a different ideal. The first ideal is Truth, the second, Beauty, the third, Righteousness: — three in one, and one in three.

In *The Blue Bird*, Tyltyl is but a little boy, and the human race is young. What he toils for is that understanding of all the things that are which shall put an end to problems and appease the seeking soul with happiness. The blue bird, in itself, is not so much a symbol of happiness as a symbol of that comprehension of the truth of all things which is the necessary precedent condition to the mood of perfect happiness.

In *The Betrothal*, Tyltyl has become adult; and what he seeks is love. The truth that had been taught to him alone, by his former journey through the universe, still needs and seeks its complement. Truth, like the fabled god named Janus, wears two faces; the other face is beauty; and beauty must evermore remain mysterious until love is ready to lift the veil that has enveloped it.

In the third play, which remains as yet unwritten, Tyltyl will be shown as an old man, and will fare forth on his final journey, through the very gates of death, in search of that dear guerdon of peace which is the ultimate reward of righteousness. [It is only fair to

the reader to confess that the present writer is not possessed of any "inside information" that this hypothetical third play is now in contemplation. The prophecy has merely been derived, by logical deduction, from an appreciative study of the hitherto existing works of Maurice Maeterlinck.]

At the outset of *The Betrothal*, Tyltyl, now seventeen years old, is tossing in bed, at that mysterious hour which immediately antecedes the dawn. The fairy Bérylune appears to him, looking rather like the widow Berlingot, who used to be his neighbor. Bérylune inquires quaintly if he is interested in the subject of love, and Tyltyl replies that he has thought of it a bit. Half a dozen lovely girls have already looked at him invitingly — the daughters of the woodcutter, the butcher, the beggar, the miller, the innkeeper, and the mayor — and he would find it rather easy to love any of them, and not particularly difficult to love all of them. The fairy cautions him that if his life is to be truly happy he must focus his affections upon one and only one; and she invites the adolescent Tyltyl to fare forth upon a journey through the universe in quest of the one and only woman.

Tyltyl goes forth upon this quest, followed faithfully by the six young girls who have already looked upon him favorably and alluringly. A seventh figure trails along, at the very end of the procession; but she is scarcely noticed, because her face is veiled. Money, it appears, is needed for the journey; and, for the purpose of securing money, the fairy Bérylune first leads Tyltyl to the miser's cave. Here, for a time,

the miser is seen grovelling obscenely over his gathered gold; but, as soon as Tyltyl turns the magic jewel that he wears upon his cap, the miser remembers the long-forgotten truth that, in reality, his heart is generous, and pours forth by handfuls to the questing youth uncounted bags of gold. Tyltyl, for a time, discards his magic cap, or else forgets to turn the mystic jewel; and, at once, the six young maidens in his train are reduced in semblance to the very women that they actually are, and fling themselves into the common sort of cat-fight that is customary among females who are attracted amorously by an identic male. But Tyltyl soon recovers his cap, and turns the magic jewel; and the six young girls immediately are revealed again as the wonder-seeking women that they really are.

The quest of Tyltyl leads him soon to the abode of his ancestors, which is peopled by hundreds and hundreds of individuals who seem, to him, surprisingly concerned in a matter so apparently personal as his choice of a bride. Some of his ancestors were respectable, some disreputable; some lofty, some lowly; some to be remembered, and some to be forgotten: but all of them are interested eagerly in his selection of a wife. The assembled senators among Tyltyl's progenitors consider gradually in review the six young and glowing girls who have been willing to attach themselves to the hero's soaring and highminded quest, as a trailing tail is appended to a sailing kite. But, with long and aged consideration, the ancestors find these many women wanting. With eyes dimmed by several centuries, they fail to see, however, the veiled figure that

still follows in the wake of the more immediate candidates for Tyltyl's troth.

But Tyltyl is soon led, by the guiding hand of the fairy Bérylune, to the abode of the children,— which corresponds, in little, to that kingdom of the future which he was privileged to visit in the course of his former journey through the universe. Here Tyltyl encounters, face to face, his own children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so forward, through an endless and illimitable series. These future and still hypothetical descendants display an even greater interest in his selection of a mate than had been shown by his ancestors. To them, of course, his choice is epoch-making. In this region of futurity the tallest children, by virtue of a rigid logic, are those who live still furthest from the world. They grow little and still littler as they dwindle, through foreshortened generations, from great-grandchildren to grandchildren and finally to children. The littlest child of all is, consequently, the one that is most ready to be born into the world.

In this mystic region of futurity, it is Tyltyl's littlest child of all that rushes forward, with wide arms, to acknowledge his predestined mother. This littlest child, in mystic and manifest agreement with all of the long-bearded members of the ancient council of Tyltyl's ancestors, rejects the glowing group comprised of the half dozen candidates regarded all along as not easily to be dismissed, but welcomes eagerly that vague and veiled and trailing figure who follows Tyltyl in his quest most modestly and with a monumental silence.

The littlest child of all flings his arms instinctively about this shadowy unknown and hails her with the honored name of mother; and five other children, only slightly taller, add their voices to this indicated harmony. It is, of course, the littlest child of all who is permitted first to lift the veil from the enshrouded face of his predestined mother. This face is very lovely; but Tyltyl does not, at the moment, recognize it. There are so many, many other matters to occupy the mind of humankind at the interested age of seventeen.

When, after all of these adventures, Tyltyl awakens in his bed, he is vaguely aware that many things have come to pass; but, as yet, he knows not what they are. At the hour of awakening, he is called back to the realm of actuality and invited to give welcome to the widow Berlingot, his former neighbor, who shows a strange resemblance to the fairy Bérylune, imaginatively privileged to wand his recent dreams. This widow Berlingot has brought along with her a little daughter whom Tyltyl had negligently ceased to think of, several years before,— the same little girl to whose hands he had entrusted the blue bird, which had forthwith fluttered freely from her grasp, "to be recovered some day." . . . So soon as Tyltyl looks clearly into the eyes of this young girl, who, for so long, has followed him in dreams as a veiled and shrouded figure, he perceives her to be, in very truth, the bride that all along has been predestined for him. Their betrothal is exchanged within the winking of an eye; and, as they march, hand in hand, to sit at table, a wicker-basket overhead bursts spontaneously into song. They look

aloft; and, lo, it contains the blue bird which had flitted and fluttered from their grasp ten years before!

Whistler, with his happy habit of talking of one art in the terms of another, might have called this parable a harmony of blue and silver. It suggests somehow the color of the sky before the dawn, in that moment when the deep blue grows aware and waiting, and the morning-star trembles with imagining of day. It is in this mood that the scenic investiture of *The Betrothal* was conceived by Mr. Ames and executed by the able collaborators that he judiciously assembled. The spectacle was presented very simply on an inner and outer stage. The transitional passages were narrated on the front-stage before a variable background of blue and silver curtains. For the more dramatic passages, these curtains were withdrawn, and a full-stage was opened to the vision, deep and high, and lyric with the beckoning of unobtrusive hints to lead the eye to wander through infinity. The scenes were designed by Herbert Paus and painted by Unitt and Wickes. The costumes were imagined by Mrs. O'Kane Conwell. The dancing numbers were arranged by the school of Isadora Duncan. The incidental music was composed by Eric Delamater. But this reportorial catalogue is not to be regarded merely as a list of names; it ought, rather, to be carved on granite as a roll of honor. The American theatre has never before disclosed, throughout its whole long century of effort, a production so completely harmonized as this.

The Betrothal may or may not be finally accepted as an equal of *The Blue Bird* in importance or in popu-

larity. But, considering the author of this play, a final little word must certainly be said in praise of him; for it is always hallowing to feel ourselves alive in the same world that looks so lovely to the clear eyes of the laureate poet of that laurelled little nation which, throughout uncounted future centuries, will be remembered with respect and admiration and saluted with the gentlemanly gesture of "Hats off!" The work of Maurice Maeterlinck, to quote an ineffable simile of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's, is like a hand laid softly on the soul.

XVII

THE SECRET OF "SALOMÉ"

There is a point of absolute intensity beyond which sensations that differ utterly in origin become indistinguishable from each other. This fact has been established by a familiar experiment in physiological psychology. Within ordinary limits, it is easy enough to feel the difference between heat and cold; but, if a man be blindfolded and if his back be pricked in quick succession with a red-hot needle and with a needle-point of ice, he will be unable to distinguish between the two impressions. Similarly, in the more exalted region of æsthetics, there is also a point of absolute intensity beyond which all emotions, regardless of their origin, produce upon the spirit an effect of beauty.

Oscar Wilde, in all his works, was a deliberate and conscious craftsman; and, in *Salomé,* he attempted the psychological experiment of producing an effect of beauty by intensifying an emotion that in itself is inconsistent with our ordinary notions of the beautiful. As a student and experimenter in the realm of theoretical æsthetics, Wilde was always singularly sane. He understood, of course, that the most revolting of all reactions is the response of the normal human being to the emotion of horror; but it occurred to him, also, that if horror were sufficiently augmented, it might

cease to seem disgusting and might assume a virtue that is commonly accorded to many less intense emotions of another kind. In answer to this philosophical intention, the author set himself the task of composing a piece in which horror should be piled on horror's head until the finally accumulated monument should take the moonbeams as a thing serenely and superbly beautiful. This, according to my understanding, was the goal that Oscar Wilde was aiming at with *Salomé*.

Maeterlinck had proved already, with *La Mort de Tintagiles*, that the emotion of terror might be intensified to a point beyond which it would become indistinguishable from the more abstract emotion of the vaguely tragic. But terror is to horror as the soul is to the body; and it is far less difficult to raise to the *n*th power an abstract sense of fear than a concrete sense of physical repulsion. This latter task was attempted by Oscar Wilde in *Salomé*. Actuated by that careful niceness which always guided him in his æsthetical decisions, Wilde wrote the play in the French language and refused until his very death to translate it into English. [The current English version of the text was paraphrased from the original French by Lord Alfred Douglas.] The medium of the clearest-minded critics in the modern world was picked out as the only proper vehicle for this adventurous incursion into a domain of metaphysics that had scarcely ever been explored in English art.

This neat and simple language, selected by the Irish Oscar Wilde, was the same language that had been chosen previously, for the same æsthetic reasons, by

the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck; and, indeed, it is obvious enough that Wilde owed much to Maeterlinck in *Salomé*. In particular, he took over from his predecessor the expedient of repeating words and phrases, until this repetition should lull and drowse the auditor into a state of autohypnotism in which any pointed impression would register an effect that would be accepted as indefinitely beautiful. The danger of this expedient is, of course, that, if it fails, it is liable to throw the audience into titters of antithetic merriment, because the emotion of humor is scarcely distinguishable from the emotion of beauty when feeling has been lifted arbitrarily to a level that is unforeseen. Wilde, of course, was sufficiently a satirist to scent this danger; and this may be regarded as another reason why he chose to write his tragedy of *Salomé* in the language of Maeterlinck — a medium effectively immune from light-hearted and unsympathetic sallies of his fellow-countrymen. Also, he composed the play as a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt and thus insured himself in advance against the danger of a hostile audience.

In foreseeing and in solving these minor incidental problems, Oscar Wilde was no less clever than in conquering his central difficulty of proving to the world the theoretical æsthetic proposition that the most repulsive sort of horror would seem beautiful if only it could be made to seem sufficiently intensified. Though *Salomé* was written a quarter of a century ago, it must still be accepted and admired as a monument of dramaturgic craftsmanship.

XVIII

"THE JEST" OF SEM BENELLI

Two quotations — like deep bells tolling from afar — are ringing in the ears of the present commentator as he attempts the task of rendering a record of the quickening impression made upon the mind by the recent production in New York of *La Cena delle Beffe*,— a tragedy by Sem Benelli, known in English as *The Jest*. The first of these is a refrain borrowed by Robert Louis Stevenson from some anonymous old poet and recorded in *The Amateur Emigrant*,—"Out of my country and myself I go." The other is that passage in Robert Browning's *By the Fireside* which begins with the enchanting lines, "And we slope to Italy at last, and youth, by green degrees," and climbs to a climax in the great ejaculation, "Oh, woman-country, wooed not wed; loved all the more by earth's male-lands; laid to their hearts instead!"

The love of Italy is as personal as the love of youth and as poignant as the love of woman; and though, in these days, Italy is regarded merely as a political entity disfavored by the President of the United States in its age-old argument against the Austrians of yesterday, the Jugo-Slavs of the moment, no man whose soul has in his youth been nourished at the breast of Browning's "woman-country" can ever keep up a

rhetorical pretense of discussing any project of Italian art in a spirit of aloofness.

"Out of my country and myself I go." . . . In no other region of the European world is it possible to escape so easily from one's habitual anchorage in self-centeredness as in this land replete with many pasts. "And we slope to Italy at last, and youth, by green degrees." . . . Here we find the explanation of the miracle; for Italy and youth are interchangeable, when regarded as milestones in the progress of the spirit.

Many thousands of Americans have been to Italy; and most of us who have followed the road to Rome have been wise enough to make the pilgrimage when we were young. Youth is the proper time to buy a donkey and to roam among the towered towns of Umbria and Tuscany in search of far forgotten frescoes by nameless makers of Madonnas. Youth is the time to fall in love with the lithe and lissom hands of Filipino Lippi's maidens, and the faces of Ghirlandaio's little boys, and the mightiness of Michelangelo. For all of us who have been privileged to go to Italy when we were young, it will nevermore be possible to slope to Italy again without sloping back to youth, by green degrees.

The signal triumph of the American production of *La Cena delle Beffe* was not so much that it took us back to Italy as that it took us back to youth. "Out of our country and ourselves we went"; we left the electric-lighted region of Times Square and were wafted overseas to lose ourselves in the sharper-shadowed and more wondrous region of the Renaissance in Florence. But, also, when the cur-

tain rose, we doffed the incubus of our accumulated years and dashed back at a gallop to the time when we were young. Since criticism — according to the formula of Anatole France — may be defined as the record of a soul's adventures among masterpieces, any work which can force the soul to enjoy the miracle of rejuvenation must be accepted as a masterpiece. Italy, of course, can always make us young; but Italy — as Secretary Baker has reminded us — is three thousand miles away. Youth, for most of us, is further away than that; yet we do not find it difficult to swim the seas and slope back at the beckoning of such a dramatist as Sem Benelli.

Another reason why *La Cena delle Beffe* takes us back to youth is not merely that it beckons us to Italy — for some of us, alas, have never visited San Gimignano delle Belle Torre — but that it also allures us to the contemplation of a region of romance that cannot be punctuated by any ticking of the clock. As methods for distilling and recording the quintessence of experience, Realism and Romance must be regarded as commensurably equable. It is possible, through the exercise of either method, to tell the truth and to engrave it upon granite. But, whenever a toss-up occurs between the two, it is safer to bet upon Romance if there is any question of longevity. The realist, as he improves his method, is inclined more and more to center his attention upon the meticulous task of depicting the manners of his own country in his own time. But, in proportion as he focusses the scope of his attention, he sacrifices the unlimited appeal to the receptive many

who consider life at large without glancing at the clock and are as willing to accept an unauthenticated tale of Patagonia as a record of experience in a boarding-house in Forty-fourth Street.

The Italian poet, Sem Benelli, has been known to our American public for several seasons as the author of the popular romantic opera, *The Love of the Three Kings*. He was only twenty-five years old when *La Cene delle Beffe* was first produced in Rome, in 1909. It took the capital by storm; a second company was organized for Florence; and in these two cities the piece ran simultaneously for hundreds and hundreds of nights. Since then, it has been acted in every town of the peninsula and has never left the Italian stage. In 1910, Sarah Bernhardt produced the play in Paris under the title of *La Beffa* and appeared in the part that was depicted, in this country, by John Barrymore. This French production was also signally successful. Any American manager might have produced *The Jest* in New York at any time within the last ten years. It is a known fact that several of our best-known impresarios considered the undertaking and decided, one by one, that, since *The Jest* was obviously a great play, the public could not be trusted to patronize it.

The Jest is popular because it permits our theatre-going public to worship at the shrine of a trinity whose all-but-holy names are Youth, Romance, and Italy,—three in one and one in three. The piece is gorgeously romantic and gloriously young. Each of its four acts crowds together and hurries forth upon the stage

enough theatrical material to furnish out an ordinary full-length play. Not a moment or a line is wasted. The author is so young and vigorous that he flings himself high-hearted to the enterprise of capturing his public by assault, instead of laying a more leisurely and careful siege to the emotions.

He deals with an epoch that, for many reasons, is fruitful in theatrical material. If those of us who are alive to-day should be invited by some god to transfer our transit through the world to some past period of history and were allowed to choose the period, we should select, first of all, the time of Pericles in Athens when human civilization touched its height, and, as our second choice, we should pick out the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence. In either of these times and places, it would scarcely have been possible to cast a casual stone without hitting some artist inspired with a singing sense of all that was and is and evermore shall be.

The civilization of Athens was submerged beneath the iniquity of oblivion when the Barbarians of the North poured downward upon Rome and overwhelmed the ancient world. Then ensued a thousand years of darkness; for the medieval centuries are justly labeled in our histories as the Dark Ages. But after a thousand years, the world was born again and tardily recalled the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome. This Renaissance was centered in that million-lilied city that bore the flowery name of Florence. The dramatic quality of this period arises from the fact that Florence was divided between the delicate

aristocrats who still remembered, after many centuries, the grandeur that was Rome and sought once more to brandish overhead the ancient but unextinguished torch of art, and the mighty men of northern birth, strong-armed and little-minded, who sought still to keep mankind enslaved in military bondage.

Politics in Florence were corrupt: the city and the province were trampled down beneath the march and countermarch of militant Teutonic hordes: but, meanwhile, men endowed with Latin souls, by hundreds and by thousands, impelled to recall the glory of the ancient world by some burgeoning as spontaneous and irresistible as the shooting-up of tulips in the early spring, were painting pictures of aloof and singing angels dancing serenely upon the pansied fields of paradise. Our blessed and angelic brother — Fra Beato Angelico — thought naught about the Teutons who had overwhelmed the world by force of arms: quite quietly he painted frescoes upon convent walls, that would remain to be remembered long after all the Teutons in the world had been forgotten.

With this hectic and dramatic struggle between the strong arm of barbarism and the strong mind of civilization — exemplified supremely in the Renaissance — Sem Benelli deals in *La Cena delle Beffe.* This is a great subject, because it stands aloof from any touch of time. The specific story of the play is concerned with a personal contest between a Pisan mercenary, Neri Chiaramentesi, who — descended from the Teutons of the North — is a giant in physical strength but a pigmy in mental ingenuity, and a Florentine

aristocrat, Giannetto Malespini, who is physically weak and tremulous but is endowed with that metaphysical gift of penetrant imagination which is the heritage of civilized mankind. Neri is a soldier, and Giannetto is merely a painter of Madonnas; Neri is a giant, and Giannetto is undersized; Neri is brave, and Giannetto is cowardly; Neri is mature, and Giannetto is perilously young: yet the weakling painter of Madonnas, by the exercise of mental subtlety, overcomes his much more powerful antagonist and drives him mad by making him the victim of a well-imagined "jest."

This is the theme of *La Cena delle Beffe;* and if this tremendously dramatic theme is comprehended by the reader, it will not be necessary for the commentator to summarize the story of the piece in more particular detail. The English adaptation has been admirably made by Edward Sheldon. Mr. Sheldon's version is rendered in iambic pentameter; and it is somewhat surprising to discover and to note the fact that this gifted author writes even better in blank verse than he has long been accustomed to write in prose.

XIX

TWO PLAYS BY JACINTO BENAVENTE

"*The Bonds of Interest*" and "*The Passion Flower*"

The romantic dramatist enjoys this large advantage over realistic rivals,— that his plays are more easily transferable from country to country and from generation to generation, because he refrains from focussing attention on matters that are local and timely. The illustrious realists of the modern French drama — like the great Émile Augier and his important disciple, Eugène Brieux — are little known outside their native country, because their work has been devoted to a study of social conditions that are peculiarly French; whereas Edmond Rostand, with the far-flung romance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, lassoed the rolling world. The realistic dramas of John Galsworthy will be forgotten before fifty years, because the social inequities and iniquities which he attacks with such commendable fervor will be remedied in half a century; and that future fiat of the public conscience which is destined to render these timely compositions obsolete will be hastened by Mr. Galsworthy's undeniable ability to make his plays persuasive to the present generation. On the other hand, there is no danger that a romantic composition like Barrie's *Peter Pan* will ever be legislated out of existence by political reformers of the future.

The present commentator is required to confess the regrettable lack of any special knowledge of the work of Jacinto Benavente,— the greatest living dramatist of Spain; but, if *The Bonds of Interest* may be regarded as a representative example of his output, it is obvious enough that his ambition is to write " not of an age but for all time." The story that is repeated in this comedy has been traditional in Spanish literature since the distant heyday of the picaresque romances; and it has been familiar in the theatre of the world since the ancient days of Plautus.

The essential points of the narrative may be patterned very quickly in a summary. Two penniless adventurers, a master and a servant, come to a town where they are totally unknown and impress the local citizens at first sight by pretending to be rich. The clever servant entangles many of the slower-minded local characters in an imaginative scheme for making money, whose only possible success depends upon the maintenance of their faith in the wealth and prowess of his mysterious and silent master. His method of enmeshing them is to bind each man to the common undertaking by the bonds of his own interest. United they will stand, divided they will fall. Therefore they remain united; and a fortune is easily conquered by the strength that arises from their union. The two penniless impostors are enriched; but the very people they intended to impose upon are enriched at the same time. Therefore, in the end of all, these two unprincipled adventurers turn moral and settle down to finish out their lives as the most respected citizens of the com-

munity that they have unintentionally benefacted.

This summary has been written purposely in terms that are abstract; and the reader will notice that — thus formulated — it would be pertinent to a review of '*Get-Rich-Quick*' *Wallingford* or of any of the twenty or thirty American comedies and farces that, in more recent years, have been written in emulation or in imitation of George M. Cohan's most celebrated play. Yet all of our American playwrights — following the lead of Mr. Cohan — have rendered a realistic treatment of this timeless story which has been passed down to our modern theatre from the ancient days of Plautus through the medium of Molière. They have all attempted to persuade the theatre-going public that this perennial plot is indigenous to America and peculiar to the present generation.

The result of this realistic treatment was inevitable. When '*Get-Rich-Quick*' *Wallingford* was "revived," a few seasons ago, it failed dismally, because the public regarded it already as "out of date"; and none of our American plays of this type has sustained the test of being acted successfully in a foreign language overseas. The depiction of local life in the office of a small-town American hotel that was presented in the first act of Mr. Cohan's *Wallingford* was nothing less than masterly in sheer theatrical technique; but would this clever act, if translated into Spanish, be interesting to an audience in Madrid?

Yet *The Bonds of Interest*, when translated into English, was interesting to an audience in New York. The main reason is that Benavente — in treating a

plot that has been traditional since Plautus — has sagely decided to set his story not in his native Spain but in an imaginary country; and the secondary reason is that, instead of attempting to restrict the project to the present period, he has preferred to launch it vaguely as a thing imagined to occur at the outset of the seventeenth century,— when, as Rostand remarked in the initial stage direction of *Les Romanesques*, the costumes were pretty. By these simple expedients, the romantic Benavente succeeded in setting forth, so long ago as 1907, a play that has outlived already the many subsequent American elaborations of the same essential plot.

It must be said, however — since an international comparison has unwittingly been instituted,— that our American playwrights easily surpass their Spanish rival in the desirable detail of a rapid rush of action. Benavente's comedy is elaborately literary and much too wordy for our taste. Our audience has not been trained, like the public of the Latin countries, to listen with approving patience to a lengthy drawing-out of lines.

The text of this play was translated into English by John Garrett Underhill, the foremost American scholar in the unfamiliar field of current Spanish literature and the official representative in this country of the Society of Spanish Authors. Mr. Underhill is a personal friend of Jacinto Benavente's, and his rendering of the text must be accepted as authoritative.

Most of our American plays seem pale and bloodless when compared with such a piece as *La Malquerida*,

a more emphatic composition by Jacinto Benavente,—which also was translated by John Garrett Underhill, and was presented under the altered title of *The Passion Flower.*

A young girl, Acacia, is about to be married to a young man, Faustino. On the eve of the wedding, Faustino is shot and killed from ambush. Suspicion is directed against Norbert, a former suitor of the girl; but Norbert is exonerated by the court when he has proved a faultless alibi. Slowly, by watching the gradual presentment of many little bits of evidence, we learn that the crime has actually been committed by a dastardly servant, Rubio, who had been hired to do the deed by Esteban, the step-father of Acacia herself. We wonder at Esteban's motive, and are ultimately shocked by the revelation that it arose from a guilty love for the girl, against which he long has vainly struggled. Esteban loves his step-daughter so intensely that he was more ready to procure the murder of her fiancé than to accept the possibility of her leaving his home. The girl herself has always repulsed the affectionate advances of Esteban, and has always felt jealous of him for having usurped the place of her dead father in the affections of her mother, Raimunda. But, in a terrible moment at the climax of the play, Acacia discovers that her imagined hatred for her step-father has merely resulted from a life-long repression of an over-mastering love for him. When this horrible revelation is made patent, Raimunda tries to come between her daughter and her husband; but the

guilty and befogged Esteban shoots her dead, and then gives himself up to the authorities.

La Malquerida is a play that deals with primitive passions; but these passions are analyzed by the author with a scientific insight that removes the drama from the bull-ring to the laboratory. It requires acting that shall be both powerful and subtle, both primordial and delicate. It is full of sound and fury, blood and sand. It offers a welcome contrast to the anæmic exhibitions that are customary in the current theatre of this country.

XX

UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIANS

Maxim Gorki's "Night Lodging"

Few statements are more silly than the usual assertion that human nature is the same the wide world over. The dog and the cat have different characters, though each of them is endowed with four legs and a tail; and we have lately learned that the psychology of the Germans is different from that of all the other races that walk upright on their rearward limbs. We shall never understand the Russians until we admit, in the first place, that human nature is not the same in Russia as it is in the United States. Mr. Kipling told us, long ago, that the Russians may be regarded either as the most eastern of western peoples or as the most western of eastern peoples. At any rate, they are not wholly of the Occident, as we are. When the Englishman is in trouble, he conceals his feelings, talks lightly of trivial matters that have nothing to do with the occasion, and resolutely "carries on." When the American is in trouble, he makes a joke of his difficulties and curses laughingly in the latest slang. When the Frenchman is in trouble, he analyzes his own situation clearly, arrives at a reasonable judgment from the facts, and then waves his hand aloft in a graceful ges-

ture and says merely, "*C'est la guerre!*" When the German is in trouble, he weeps sentimental tears and calls upon his tribal deity. But when the Russian is in trouble, he luxuriates in this abnormal situation, wallows nakedly in the pathetic, and indulges in a veritable orgy of self-pity. He loves himself the more because his lot is hard; he worries about his soul to an extent that western men will not permit themselves to worry; and his abject attitude of thanking God for chastisement remains quite incomprehensible to the occidental mind.

It is well for us to understand the Russians, because they are more numerous than we are, and are possibly predestined to play a larger part in the future drama of humanity. The quickest way to understand them is to study their literature, and to compare it with ours. The Russian writers easily excel our own in sheer immensity; but they cannot compete with our occidental artists in the matter of orderly arrangement. Here, at once, we sense a basic difference between two antithetic types of mind. The Russians exceed us in potentiality, in fruitfulness; but we exceed them in efficiency and in the scientific application of the practical. There is, here and now before us, no question of better or of worse; the immediate problem is to recognize and to define essential differences. The drama is the one art through which a people can speak most clearly; and an interchange of plays between the Russians and ourselves is greatly to be desired in the present period of mutual misunderstanding. Unfortunately the drama in this country is so inconsider-

able that there are no plays of American authorship that we could profitably send to Moscow; but Arthur Hopkins has made a move in the right direction by resolving to set before the American public a series of plays of Russian authorship. In 1918, he showed us *The Living Corpse* of Count Tolstoi; and, in December, 1919, he inaugurated a series of special matinées devoted to an exhibition of *Night Lodging*, a tragedy by Maxim Gorki, which had long been celebrated in nearly every city of world-importance but New York.

It may be doubted if *Night Lodging* would be commercially successful if it were presented in New York for a regular run, for it is totally foreign to our American ideas of "entertainment." We are taken to a foul and filthy lodging-house, inhabited by the scum and dregs of Russian humanity,— a helter skelter group of beggars, thieves, drunkards, prostitutes, murderers, and wastrels. We are made to witness their daily doings; we are made to overhear their momentary conversations; we are made to explore the darkest and most intimate recesses of their slimy souls. The first impression we receive is one of horror,— horror that such creatures should exist, and horror that any author with a manifest ability to wield a pen should permit his mind to brood so persistently on their existence. For *Night Lodging* is not true to life, as life is visioned by our occidental writers. Gorki's tragedy is sedulously faithful to facts; but its selection of facts from life is — to our minds — unfaithfully proportioned. There are seventeen people in this play. Suppose, now, that an enormous crowd of people should be gath-

ered hugger mugger in Trafalgar Square, the Place de la Concorde, Union Square, or the Lake Front in Chicago; and suppose, next, that somebody should hurl a bomb that should indiscriminately kill any seventeen people in this entire crowd. To the mind of such a man as Abraham Lincoln, it would be unimaginable that not one person in the seventeen should be worthy of respect, that not one person in the seventeen should have a single friend to love him and to lament the deep damnation of his taking off. The mind of Abraham Lincoln is the American mind. We believe in people. But Maxim Gorki is a Russian. God only knows what he believes in; for he does not believe in God, he does not believe in life, he does not believe in people.

No reasoned philosophy of life is apparent in this piece; but there is a single little clue that seems to open a tiny window on the author's mind. An old man — a sort of pilgrim — wanders into the play toward the close of the first act and wanders out of it again before the last act is arrived at. The other characters are intolerant of this aged wanderer; he has no friends; and yet — to a western audience — he seems comparatively likable. He is kind to people, without any reason to be kind; and he says one thing that is particularly worthy of remembrance. He asserts that human nature, even at its lowest, remains somehow human, and that none of us should ever dare to insult a human being by regarding him with pity. Pity, he tells us, is a base emotion, because it is born of egoism and is nearly related to contempt. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." This is a great saying. . . .

Yet, if we may not pity the helpless and the hopeless of this world, what can we do for them, and what shall we do about them? Maxim Gorki does not answer; for his lips are sealed. He is like a miner in the bowels of the earth, so blinded by the stinking darkness that envelops him that he forgets that, up above him, on the surface of the seas, many mariners are steering sleek and graceful ships by the shining of the everlasting stars.

Yet this gloomy and discomfortable Russian is endowed with an immensity of mind that puts our native dramatists to shame. He splashes at a ten-league canvas with brushes of comets' hair; and we westerners who yelp against him should perhaps regard ourselves as a pack of coddled little lap-dogs baying at the moon. The moon is cold and dead; but who are we to bark against it? We may conserve our dignity most gracefully by confessing that we do not understand the Russians.

To the occidental mind, *Night Lodging* is a formless play. It has no plot. It has no beginning, no middle, and no end. It never rises to a climax; yet every moment is unaccountably dramatic. It might go on forever, like a Chinese drama. The spectator may come late, and arrive at any moment; he may leave early, and forsake the theatre at any moment: any ten minutes of *Night Lodging* is essentially the same as any other, and as good as any other. The piece offers merely a sort of peep-hole upon Russian life, or so much of Russian life as Maxim Gorki has cared to contemplate; and this life is, in the main, a rather dreary

thing that drifts along with no particular accentuation of excitement.

This is a totally different presentment from that shrewdly selected and meticulously patterned drama that we, in England and America, have inherited from France. But let us not surrender to the egoism of assuming that Maxim Gorki is not an artist; let us assert merely that Gorki is a Russian, and that our minds work differently. We build our plays more cleverly; but seldom or never do we achieve that absolute sincerity of sheer reporting which is evident in every line of Maxim Gorki's dialogue.

XXI

TWO PLAYS BY COUNT LEO TOLSTOI

"*The Living Corpse*" and "*The Power of Darkness*"

Whenever a great master of one medium of art feels impelled to express himself through another medium with which he is comparatively unfamiliar, the result, though seldom completely satisfactory, is nearly always interesting and is often strikingly original. Michelangelo was primarily a sculptor, secondarily a painter; and only rarely did he turn his hand to architecture. When he was called upon to disentangle the confusion into which the pattern for St. Peter's had become involved, he did not succeed in working out the problem to a logical conclusion; but, obeying an heroic impulse, he crowned an architectural monstrosity with that incomparable dome which is one of the glories of the world.

A great man who is also a great artist within his chosen and accustomed sphere may bring to the practice of an unfamiliar craft a freshness of spirit that is rendered more acute because, for once, he is working as an amateur and not as a professional. Who is there who would not wish to read that fabled century of sonnets which Raphael is reputed to have written for his lady? And is there a picture in all Florence that we would not gladly give for a sight of that lost draw-

ing of an angel which Dante tells us that he was engaged upon one day when he was interrupted by the intrusion of certain people of importance? Doubtless Raphael was not another Petrarch, nor could Dante be regarded as a second Giotto; but these labors of their love must certainly have been irradiated with the very essence of their souls.

Count Leo Tolstoi, before making his noble but regrettable decision to renounce the practice of creative literature in order to immerse his mind in religious meditation, had established an impregnable reputation as one of the greatest novelists that ever lived. On the other hand, he had had no training whatsoever as a dramatist. In the first place, he had never been a theatre-going man, nor even a closet-student of the masterpieces of dramatic literature; and, in the second place, when Tolstoi's career was at its prime, the modern Russian drama had not yet emerged, and the Russian theatre, which is now so well equipped, was in its infancy. Yet, late in his life, this great writer felt a strong impulsion to express himself in the dramatic form; and, regardless of his lack of training in an unaccustomed craft, he wrote a few plays, of which the most interesting is, perhaps, *The Living Corpse.*

The Living Corpse was written in 1902, when Count Tolstoi was seventy-four years old. He did not live to complete the final revision of the text that he had intended; but a full manuscript was found among his papers after his death, and the piece was soon accorded a posthumous production. It has been famous on the continent of Europe for a decade and a half; and, in

past years, it has been acted in New York both in German and in Yiddish. The first American production in the English language was launched in October, 1918, by Arthur Hopkins; and this production afforded a welcome opportunity for studying this interesting play.

The first important point to be observed is that the structure of *The Living Corpse* is utterly unconventional. It would appear that Count Tolstoi, at the outset of the twentieth century, was either ignorant or scornful of the trend which the dramaturgic art had taken throughout the three preceding generations. It was Eugène Scribe, in the decade of the eighteen-thirties, who initiated the nineteenth century formula of "the well-made play." This pattern was improved, in the succeeding generation, by Alexandre Dumas *fils;* and, in the decade of the eighteen-nineties, it was improved still further by Sir Arthur Pinero. Scribe, also, was the teacher of Tolstoi's contemporary, Henrik Ibsen; and Ibsen is not only the greatest modern dramatist, but also the most representative playwright of the nineteenth century. He taught, by his example, a very high regard for strictness of technique. No other plays of any period are so tightly and so carefully constructed as those of the great Norwegian dramatist. Every line is made to answer to every other line; and to delete a single speech or bit of "business" might lead to an unravelling of the entire pattern.

Tolstoi was either ignorant of Ibsen or unimpressed by his laborious example. No effort has been made to pattern *The Living Corpse* in three acts or in four, with every moment revealing a logical relation to every

other moment. Instead, the story is unfolded in a sequence of eleven episodes. Only two of these episodes happen in the same place, so that ten different stage-settings are required; and the author handles the category of time as freely as he handles the category of place. Undoubtedly this narrative method was employed because it seemed most natural to the mind of a novelist. He imagined his story in chapters, not in acts; and he set it forth in the form and order in which it had revealed itself to his imagination.

It may seriously be doubted that Count Tolstoi was conscious of the fact that his technical method more nearly resembled that of Shakespeare than that of the best playwrights of the nineteenth century. Shakespeare's frequent changes of time and place, his free and easy habit of constructing a play in an uncounted sequence of scenes, were practically suited to the exigencies of the inner and outer stage for which his plays were fashioned; but assuredly the Russian novelist was not attempting to plan a piece for the Elizabethan theatre. Neither could he have foreseen, in 1902, that the subsequent invention of many stage appliances to make possible a more rapid shifting of scenery in the modern theatre would soon render *The Living Corpse* more stageworthy than it was at the moment when it was composed. Many Russian plays at present are constructed in a sequence of from half a dozen to a dozen scenes; but this fact does not result so much from the example set by Count Tolstoi as from the simplification of scenery that has taken place within the last ten years.

The novelistic method of *The Living Corpse* is interesting from the outset because of its originality; and, as the play progresses, the spectator gradually realizes that the construction is not nearly so haphazard as it seems. The piece, in fact, is built like a huge pyramid. In the early episodes, the foundation is laid out upon a broad and ample base. Then, little by little, the superstructure is reared up, growing always narrower and sharper at the same time that it is growing higher, until at last the whole thing culminates in an acute point of dramatic agony.

The subject-matter of *The Living Corpse* is no less unconventional than the technical method. It was as long ago as 1893 that Ferdinand Brunetière made his famous empirical announcement that the essence of the drama was an assertion of the human will and that the most dramatic scenes were those in which opposing human wills were shown in conflict. Yet the hero of *The Living Corpse* may almost be described as a man without a will. He drifts through life along the line of least resistance, and never asserts himself at all. Any practical playwright of the eighteen-nineties would certainly have judged that the subject-matter of *The Living Corpse* was hopelessly undramatic; yet the undeniable fact remains that the play is intensely interesting in the theatre.

The story of the piece is so well known that a brief summary will suffice to recall it to the attention of the reader. Fedya, the hero, is cursed with the poetic temperament without being gifted with the real poet's power of attaining self-fulfilment through self-expres-

sion. He drifts into long continued periods of drinking, and spends most of his time with a tribe of singing gypsies. Masha, a girl of this tribe, is the one person in the world who inspires him to glimpses of his better self; and for her he develops a very strong affection, which remains, however, always scrupulously chaste. Meanwhile, Fedya's deserted wife, named Liza, begins to see more and more of a very worthy friend of hers and Fedya's who has loved her for many years. This friend, named Victor, is an honorable man, and does his best to induce Fedya to return to Liza; but when his best efforts to this end have proved of no avail, he implores Liza to secure a divorce and to marry him. Fedya also is an honorable man. He believes that his wife will be more happy as the wife of Victor, and he desires to grant her the divorce that she deserves. But he is confronted by the uncomfortable fact that the divorce laws of Russia are just as archaic as those of New York State. Liza cannot secure a divorce unless she can prove in court that her husband has committed adultery,— a thing that he has never done. His sensitive soul revolts against the usual expedient of hiring some woman of the streets to fabricate false evidence against him; and he decides, instead, to kill himself in order to set Liza free to marry Victor. But when he raises the pistol to his head, he realizes with dismay that he lacks sufficient will to pull the trigger. In this dilemma, Masha, the gypsy girl, persuades him to pretend that he has committed suicide by jumping into the river, to arrange ample circumstantial evidence of suicide, and then to disappear forever. This he does.

His supposititious death is adequately attested; and, in due time, Liza and Victor are married happily.

Meanwhile, Fedya, leading the aimless life of a living dead man, sinks lower and lower into the very depths of the slums. At last, one night, he tells his strange story to a companion in a cheap drinking den. The story is overheard by a criminal who, after failing to extort blackmail from the penniless Fedya as the price of silence, reports it to the authorities. Liza, Victor, and Fedya are dragged into court; and the innocent married couple are accused of deliberate bigamy. The progress of the trial is very harrowing to all concerned, because of the injustice of the laws and the stupidity of their administration. Finally, Fedya, in an agony of self-reproach, summons up the sudden courage to shoot himself, in a corridor outside the courtroom, and thereby solves the situation with a tragic last self-sacrifice.

This is, in itself, an interesting story; but, as Count Tolstoi has treated it, the characters are immeasurably more important than the plot. The accuracy of his observation, the intimacy of his analysis, the profundity of his sympathy, produce an impression of the immensity of life that is rarely to be met with in the modern theatre. Though *The Living Corpse*, according to the point of view, may or may not be regarded as a great play, there is no denying that it is a great work and that it was written by a great man.

But, of all the Russian plays that have been presented in New York, *The Power of Darkness*, by Count Tolstoi, is the most easily appreciable by our occidental

public. It was written so long ago as 1886, before the modern Russian drama had begun its progress toward that technical anarchy which is illustrated by such a composition as Maxim Gorki's *Night Lodging*. Count Tolstoi was not a theatre-goer, and he was not a thorough student of the dramatic literature of the world; yet, in this play, he followed the form with which habitual patrons of the theatre were familiar, instead of attempting that novelistic pattern which he essayed, nearly twenty years later, in *The Living Corpse*.

Most modern Russian plays crowd an enormous canvas with a multitude of living figures, but are lacking in composition and design; but *The Power of Darkness* is patterned just as clearly as any play by Ibsen or by Dumas *fils*, with whose contemporary efforts the great Russian author remained obtusely unfamiliar. This piece reveals that unity of plot which is demanded by our western minds. It tells a single story with a cumulative intensity. No details are introduced which are extraneous to the essential pattern. A predestined climax is attained at the curtain-fall of the penultimate act; and the play closes wth a logical catastrophe that might almost be described as a "happy ending." The piece is absorbing in its intellectual interest and overwhelming in its emotional appeal.

Professors of hygienic science have taught us recently that germs of disease are more likely to multiply in darkness than in the curative light of the sun. So long ago as 1886, Count Tolstoi informed the world that the germs of sin are more likely to multiply be-

neath the darkness of ignorance than beneath the beaming of the light of education. He shows us the Russian peasants as they live,— uncultured, uneducated, tragically ignorant. He shows us that, among such people, an initial sin will naturally propagate itself from crime to crime until it has engendered a museum of horrors.

In one point — and only one — this play is unconventional, according to our occidental standards. It is not at all surprising that Count Tolstoi, in 1886, had never heard of that empirical principle, first announced in 1893 by Ferdinand Brunetière, to the effect that the drama should deal with an assertion of the human will. Nikita, the hero of this play, like Fedya, the hero of *The Living Corpse*, which was written nearly twenty years later than *The Power of Darkness*, is a man without a will. He drifts through life along the line of least resistance. He is not deliberately vicious; yet he is impelled from crime to crime by influences that are stronger than himself. The germs of sin are fructified within his soul by the power of darkness. Before long, his tragic situation is akin to that of Macbeth, at that moment when he said, "I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er."

Nikita, a simple-minded laborer, is working on the land of Peter, a well-to-do peasant. He falls illicitly in love with Peter's second wife, Anisya. Nikita has previously seduced an orphan girl, Marina. His pious father, Akim, deems him bound in duty to marry this girl; but his evil-minded mother, Matryona, thinks

otherwise. This wicked old woman gives Anisya certain powders for poisoning her husband, Peter; and these powders are employed effectively. Nikita deserts Marina and marries Anisya. Soon he sickens of her and seduces her step-daughter, Akoulina, the child of Peter by his former marriage. Akoulina becomes, in time, the mother of an illegitimate child. When this baby is born, the strong-willed Matryona induces Nikita to slay it and to bury it in the cellar. To avoid scandal, Akoulina is subsequently offered in marriage to a trusting youth of the neighboring peasantry. The festivities, however, are rudely interrupted when Nikita, having been converted by the persistent power of his father's inarticulate religious faith, insists upon confessing his accumulated crimes to the assembled multitude.

This play is appallingly dramatic in the constantly increased intensity of its successive scenes. It is another *Macbeth*, composed in modern terms and reimagined in the mood of realism. The characters are terribly true; and the dialogue is impressively poignant.

XXII

IBSEN ONCE AGAIN

It is more than a dozen years since Madame Nazimova made her first appearance in the English language, in the part of Hedda Gabler. To students who were thoroughly familiar with the play, her impersonation of this character seemed to be based upon a misconception; but it was at least well rendered, and the very novelty of a Hedda conceived as sensuous and languorous, instead of coldly and brilliantly intelligent, resulted in a great deal of unmerited praise from the reviewers. Madame Nazimova had been previously seen, in Russian, as Regina in *Ghosts*,— a part that she has not yet played in English; and her Hedda was soon followed by a rendering of Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*. Her Nora — in contradistinction to her Hedda — was satisfactory in all respects, and established her beyond cavil as an Ibsen actress of a very high order. A year later, she played Hilda Wangel to the Master Builder of Mr. Walter Hampden, whose performance of this massive part was monumental in its rugged grandeur, and amazed all commentators on the current situation by scoring a commercial success which kept the theatre crowded week after week with a play that had previously been assumed to soar "over the heads of the public." Two

years later, Madame Nazimova exhibited a memorable rendering of Rita Allmers in *Little Eyolf;* and her performance of this character — particularly in the first act — touched the high-water mark of her achievement as an actress of Ibsen. Yet, since the spring of 1910, Madame Nazimova had not again revisited the glimpses of Broadway with any play of Ibsen's until she was persuaded by Mr. Arthur Hopkins to undertake a series of Ibsen " revivals " in 1918. [The word " revival " is somewhat insulting to the greatest modern dramatist, because it suggests that his plays have been at some time dead, and have needed a miraculous resuscitation; yet, in a theatre which has falsely set a premium on novelty, it has crept into common usage in the vocabulary of comment.]

This Ibsen season was inaugurated by Mr. Hopkins at the Plymouth Theatre on the evening of March 11, 1918, with the first performance of *The Wild Duck* that had ever been offered in the English language in New York,— though an excellent rendition of this play had been previously given in the German language in January, 1917, with that admirable actor, Herr Rudolf Christians, in the rôle of Hjalmar Ekdal. In this production, Madame Nazimova assumed, for the first time, the minor but delicate and difficult part of the little martyred Hedwig, and acquitted herself with credit. *Hedda Gabler* was resumed — with less success — on April 8; and *A Doll's House* — the most popular of all the Ibsen plays — was triumphantly repeated on April 29.

These Ibsen " revivals " were generously patronized,

especially by the studious classes who frequent the cheaper seats; and *A Doll's House* crowded the Plymouth Theatre to capacity. The response of the public gave ample attestation to the fact that a decade is too long a period to banish Ibsen arbitrarily from the theatres of Broadway. Madame Nazimova's impersonations are not, by any means, of even merit. According to the judgment of the present commentator, her Nora is in all ways satisfactory, her Rita is exceptionally admirable, her Hedwig is cleverly adequate, her Hilda is merely passable, and her Hedda is utterly mistaken. Yet all of her performances of Ibsen — good and bad — are worth seeing many times, because — even at their poorest — they afford repeated opportunities for studying the masterpieces of the greatest modern playwright.

When *The Wild Duck* was presented by Mr. Hopkins, it came to most of the audience as a new play, after a decade which had been strangely bare of performances of Ibsen; and the effect upon the public and the critics was remarkable. Mr. Hopkins's method of production is founded sanely on the theory that it is better to leave a play alone, to work its will on the spectator, than to attempt to decorate or to embellish or even to interpret it. His stage-direction is admirable not so much because of what he does as because of what he refuses to do. Simplification is his method, and simplicity is his excellence. In producing *The Wild Duck*, Mr. Hopkins did not allow himself to be overawed by the gigantic reputation of the author. He directed the performance with the same freshness

— and, one might almost say, the same irresponsibility — that he might have shown in staging a "script" by John Doe,— a promising but quite uncelebrated playwright. As a consequence of this easy-going method, the audience was surprised to discover that Ibsen is enjoyable, and that it is possible to buy tickets for an Ibsen play because of the incentive of a wish for entertainment, instead of a desire for instruction or a solemn sense of duty.

The Wild Duck, though grim in subject-matter and truly terrible in its culminating moments, was conceived essentially as a sardonic comedy. As Mr. Edmund Gosse has justly said,—"The topsy-turvy nature of this theme made Ibsen as nearly 'rollicking' as he ever became in his life." The surprising thing, therefore, is not that the audience should laugh at Ibsen's "rollicking," but that anybody should have been surprised by the spontaneity of this laughter. And even more surprising was the tardy discovery of the reviewers that *The Wild Duck* is genuinely enjoyable in the theatre. Ibsen had lost much, in the appreciation of the public, from the accidental fact that his plays had been banished from our current stage for a dozen years. During the passage of this decade, he had come to be regarded — to state the fact conveniently in slang — as a sort of "high-brow," instead of a sure-enough competitor for the plaudits of an avid audience with so practical a pair of playwrights as Mr. George Broadhurst and Mr. Bayard Veiller.

Ibsen died in 1906; and now, for the first time, he is beginning to be appreciated in this country from the

disinterested point of view of sheer dramatic criticism. So long as he was still alive, his plays were studied not as plays, but under the different labels of "literature," "philosophy," or "sociology." The casual patrons of our theatre were told that they should see his dramas because of a sense of duty and not because of the incentive of enjoyment; and, in pursuance of this method, even so popular a piece as *A Doll's House* was heralded by many commentators as a sort of family funeral.

The reason for this *cul de sac*, which pocketed for many many years the popularity of Ibsen as a purveyor of entertainment, is easily apparent. Our native knowledge of Ibsen was imported overseas from England; and it was in England that the misconception of this author as a "high-brow" first originated. Ibsen was "discovered" for the English public by Mr. William Archer and Mr. Edmund Gosse; but, when these two enlightened critics endeavored to deliver their discovery, they found themselves impeded by the medieval institution of the British censorship of plays. Because of this impediment, the very first performance of an Ibsen play in England — that epoch-making production of *Ghosts* which was shown in 1891 by Mr. J. T. Grein before the private audience of the Independent Theatre Society — was regarded by the general public as a thing tabooed and flung beyond the pale. In consequence of this condition, the comments called forth by this first performance of a play of Ibsen's in the English language were based upon contrasted theories of ethics instead of being based on theories of drama-

turgic craftsmanship. The reviewers missed the point entirely.

Ibsen was criticized — in the England of the early eighteen-nineties — as a sociologist, a philosopher, a man of letters, a moralist, a propagandist,— in short, as everything except the one thing that he really was, — a practical and interesting playwright. His technique — as a professional dramatist — was not discussed, despite the repeated pleas of so appealing a dramatic critic as Mr. Archer. Instead, his commentators — *pro* and *con* — contented themselves with throwing mud or throwing roses against his subject-matter, — which is, of course, the last thing to be considered by a genuine dramatic critic in analyzing any well-made play. Not what an author says, but how effectively he says it in the theatre, is the proper theme for analytic criticism; for, in the great art of the drama, the "message" of an author is superior to comment, and nothing offers invitation to the technical interpreter but the mere efficiency displayed, or missed, in the elocution of this "message" to the public.

Because of the incubus of the British censorship, an impression was spread abroad, throughout the eighteen-nineties, that Ibsen should be regarded as a philosophic thinker and a man of letters, instead of being judged as a playwright ambitious to receive the plaudits of the theatre-going public. From the effect of this misconceived impression, our casual American audience is only now beginning to recover. Our local public is now learning, tardily, to see that Ibsen was a playwright, first and last and all the time.

The truth of the matter now, at last, appears to be that Ibsen was a very great artist of the theatre, and was nothing else at all. Quite obviously — in the cold light of our later learning — he cannot be accepted seriously as a man of letters. He had no literary training; and he never acquired the advantage of a literary culture. In the decade of his 'teens, he did not go to school: in the decade of his twenties, he was not even registered as a regular student in the provincial University of Christiania. His entire education was not literary but theatrical. At the age of twenty-four, he went to Bergen as the general stage-manager of a stock-company in that isolated town; and, in this capacity, he worked a dozen hours every day throughout five successive years. His annual salary amounted, in round numbers, to three hundred dollars; and his apprenticeship may be understood most quickly if we face the fact that, throughout the formative period of his youth, he exerted all his energies, at a dollar a day, to the task of setting forth a new play every week with a stock-company localized before the public of a little city as secluded as Schenectady, New York.

In these years of his apprenticeship, Ibsen had no time to read; and all that he could learn was acquired incidentally from his necessary business of presenting to the local Bergen public many French plays of the school of Scribe. His own first play of any prominence — *Lady Inger of Ostrat* — was written in emulation of the current formula of Scribe; and this minor but inevitable incident is indicative of the important fact that Ibsen's education was derived not from the library but

from the stage. Never at any time — in the midst of a perilous attempt to earn his living against agonizing odds — did Ibsen ever find the leisure to become a "man of letters." In his twenties and his thirties, he read a few plays of Schiller and a few plays of Shakespeare; and, at the same period, he seems to have become more familiar than he was willing later to admit with both parts of Goethe's *Faust;* but, to the end of his days, he remained distinctly — and this fact became with him a point of pride — a playwright who knew next to nothing of the history of literature. Though most Norwegians are accustomed, as a matter of course, to study many other languages, Ibsen never acquired an easy fluency in any foreign tongue but German. Late in his life, he said to one of his Boswells that he hated all the plays of Alexander Dumas *fils,* and added the unexpected comment,—"But, of course, I have never read them." The last remark was, presumably, more candid than the first: for Ibsen, in his later years, was genuinely proud of the fact that he had read little except the daily newspapers. When commentators pointed out that the patterned formula of *Ghosts* recalled the technique of Euripides, he would retort irately that he had never read Euripides.

It was not until the time of the Italian tour which Ibsen undertook in the middle of his thirties that he ever actually saw any of the major works of architecture, painting, or sculpture that are existent in the world. At this belated moment, he attempted — to employ a phrase that is current in the narrowly restricted world of professional baseball — a "delayed

steal" of culture; and his experience ran parallel to that of our own Nathaniel Hawthorne, who also made a pilgrimage to Italy at a time of life too long deferred. Like Hawthorne, Ibsen appreciated the wrong paintings, admired the wrong statues, and waxed enthusiastic over the wrong works of architecture. While showing the sensitized impressibility of a responsive temperament, he betrayed also the effects of an early education that had been exceedingly defective. Even in responding to the appeals of such æsthetic regions as Rome, Sorrento, and Amalfi, Ibsen remained the stage-director of a stock-company in Schenectady, instead of rising to the rarer atmosphere of a stimulated man of letters.

If Ibsen lacked culture in the realm of letters — and he frequently, when interviewed, insisted on the point that he was not well-read — it is even more obvious that he claimed no standing whatsoever as a sociologist or a philosopher. He regarded himself as a playwright, first and last and all the time,— that is to say, a craftsman whose task it was to interest the public by holding, as 't were, a mirror up to nature in the actual, commercial theatre. His teacher was Eugène Scribe,— that exceedingly adroit technician who codified the formula of "the well-made play" ["*la pièce bien faite*"]; and the contemporary of whose exploits he was most justly jealous was Alexander Dumas *fils*, — who, like himself, attempted in his own way to improve and to perfect the formula of Scribe. Ibsen was not a philosopher; for he was ignorant of the accumulated records of philosophic literature. The author of

Brand and *Peer Gynt* is not to be regarded primarily as a poet; for he had never studied any other universally important poem except the first and second parts of Goethe's *Faust*. To sum the matter up, he should not be considered in any other light than as an honest craftsman of the theatre who endeavored — in accordance with that downright statement of the practical Pinero —" to give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect, the production of which is the one great function of the theatre."

Because of the distressing influence of a medieval British censorship, Ibsen was long regarded, in the English-speaking theatre, as a sort of Doctor Munyon of the drama, lifting loftily an admonitory finger to the moralists and crying, " I'm for health!," while his opponents countered with the Puritanical assertion that his purpose and effect were merely to disseminate disease. Now at last — in consequence of the repeated efforts of Madame Nazimova and the new enthusiasm of Mr. Arthur Hopkins — the undertakings of this downright manufacturer of plays for the general and normal public are beginning to be appreciated at their worth, as compositions which require the disinterested admiration of all who seek " to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the theatre of the world."

XXIII

TWO PLAYS BY ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

"*John Ferguson*" and "*Jane Clegg*"

If art may fairly be defined as "life seen through a temperament," it follows that the flavor of a work of art must depend less upon the sort of life that is looked at than upon the sort of temperament through which it is observed. The mind of the artist is more important than his subject-matter. This is particularly evident in the domain of painting. It did not matter whether Rembrandt chose to paint a chine of beef or the face of an old man; the result, in either instance, was a work of art, because it was sure to show the painter's incomparable eye for chiaroscuro. In the theatre, the untutored members of the public are likely to judge plays by their subject-matter,— to patronize one piece because they like the story and to neglect another because the narrative does not appeal to them; but, for the critical observer, there is matter of more interest in the way in which the subject is handled by the dramatist. A block of stone is but a block of stone: if it be hacked into a statue, its worth will depend on what the artist does to it. One man might mold a better work of art in butter than another man in beaten gold.

Life, the subject-matter of all art, is everywhere adjacent to us. For the price of a ticket to the subway, we may read a hundred stories in a hundred faces,

all about us. Only, most of us don't do it: we lack the seeing eye. The artist sees. He makes life interesting to the rest of us, by showing us a way of looking at it. The life that he shows us may be commonplace; but his vision is not. Velasquez might have painted a corrugated ash-can, with the uttermost fidelity to fact; yet his picture would have been a thing of beauty, and, in consequence, a joy forever. There are ways of looking at the play of lights and shadows on an ash-can,— eternal ways. "Life, like a dome of many-colored glass, stains the white radiance of eternity"; but the mind of the artist is a prism with the magic power to recompose the scattered colors of the spectrum into a clear and focussed beam of that eternal light that never was on sea or land.

There is very little in the plays of Mr. St. John Ervine to catch and capture the attention of those untutored theatre-goers who are avid for something novel or something sensational in subject-matter. Mr. Ervine deals with commonplace people — with people just as ordinary as the man who is crammed against you in a crowded hour of the subway, and whom you never see — and he contents himself with situations that are traditional. His dramas are, in subject-matter, as old as the hills: yet the aged and familiar hills of Cumberland were very beautiful when William Wordsworth looked upon them. When Mr. Ervine writes a play, it is more than likely to be worth traveling many miles to see, for the simple reason that Mr. Ervine is endowed with a mind that is exceptionally fine. This mind is a sort of window through which we are per-

mitted to look at life. A window is not at all an unfamiliar object: but there are windows and other windows in this world, and that is the reason why Keats wrote his memorable phrase about "charmed magic casements opening. . . ."

In the facetious epilogue to *Fanny's First Play*, Mr. Shaw satirically put into the mouth of a dramatic critic, Flawner Bannel, the remark, "If it's by a good author, it's a good play, naturally. That stands to reason. Who is the author?" This remark was regarded as uproariously funny by the anonymous writer of *Fanny's First Play* and by a diverted public that had solved the secret of this anonymity; yet there is a grain of serious truth in this amusing statement, after all. If a play is by a good author, it is more than likely to be a good play, "naturally,"— for authorship, to the discerning, counts more than subject-matter, and nearly everything depends upon the sort of mind through which the subject-matter passes in its transit from the archives which contain "the thirty-six dramatic situations," enumerated by the investigating Gozzi, to the attention of a gathered and receptive audience. A bad author might even impede the appeal of the subject-matter of *The Trojan Women*,— which, in the opinion of the present commentator, is the most pathetic play in all the world; whereas a good author may easily lift his treatment of an unpromising subject to the level of enduring literature. In support of this argument, it is necessary only to compare what German scholars call the *Ur-Hamlet* with the revised *Hamlet* of William Shakespeare.

Mr. St. John Ervine is very welcome to our theatre, because of the simple fact that he is "a good author." It is a fine adventure to be permitted to look at some familiar character or some traditional situation through the window of his mind. We go to the theatre, not to hear what Mr. Ervine has to talk about, but to listen to Mr. Ervine and to enjoy his way of talking. Thereby we pay a tribute to the artist and recognize the merit of his mind.

In *Jane Clegg*, the heroine, who is an ordinary woman, has wrestled for a long time with the not uncustomary problem of living amicably with a husband who is unworthy of her. Some years before the play begins, she had caught him in a flagrant case of infidelity; but, because of her economic dependence on her husband, and the crying need of her infant children for support, she had condoned this offense and had accepted the promise of her husband never to repeat it. Henry Clegg is a commercial traveler. Incidentally, he is a liar, a gambler, and a thief. His wife discovers these regretted facts successively, as the plot develops. She has recently inherited the sum of seven thousand pounds from a deceased uncle, and is now able to support — in case of need — not only herself but also her two children. When her husband gets into trouble, she is willing to help him out; and, to shield him from going to jail, she even consents to advance, out of her legacy, a considerable sum of money; but the soul of Jane Clegg rebels against the situation when she discovers ultimately that her husband, Henry, has been plunged into it by an ill-advised association with a "fancy woman."

Henry Clegg has planned to run away to Canada, on stolen money, with his mistress. When Jane Clegg has discovered this, she does not try to compel her husband to remain at home. Instead, she opens wide the door, and forces him forth, to face a questionable future with the woman of his fancy.

The final scene of *Jane Clegg* is, of course, immediately reminiscent of that great colloquy which concluded *A Doll's House;* yet the dialogue, at many points, is even more poignantly intimate, and the episode is made by the genius of the author to appear both unfamiliar and engrossing. The antecedent action is entirely traditional; yet its progress is exalted far above the level of the commonplace by the uncustomary note of sheer sincerity in the author's attitude of mind. What he mainly cares about is characterization; and his characters are almost discomfortably real. His careful depiction of Henry Clegg — an " absolute rotter," as the author calls him in the lines — is a masterpiece of sheer delineation; and all the other characters are drawn to the life.

John Ferguson, by the same author, is a great play, because it discusses a momentous theme through a medium of realistic utterance which, though apparently commonplace, reveals the virtue of utter intellectual integrity.

In common with many other great plays, *John Ferguson* deals anew with narrative materials that had already been worn threadbare in the theatre before the date of its composition. There is no surer way for any gifted author to win fame in the theatre than by re-

peating a familiar story and surprising the audience by telling the truth about it, in violation of traditional expectancy. In *John Ferguson,* we meet once more the ancient motive of the mortgage on the farm, the long-familiar heartache arising from the letter mailed too late, the conventional story of the maiden wronged and the murder of the villain who traduced her, and the subsequent juggling of credit for this murder between the weak man who, for moral reasons, ought to have committed it and the strong man who, for practical reasons, actually did the deed. The inspired half-wit who wanders in and out of the story, inciting better brains than his to action, is also a traditional figure in the drama. There is no element of novelty in this narrative nor in the handling of it; and there is nothing new nor unaccustomed in any of the characters that people the conventional pattern. Yet Mr. Ervine has portrayed these characters with an astonishing profundity of insight; and his story is set forth with such sincerity and fervor as to convince the auditor that it is absolutely true.

John Ferguson, considered solely on the basis of its subject-matter, might be dismissed as "old stuff," to use a rather vulgar phrase that is popularly current in the theatre; but this composition cannot rightly be regarded as "old stuff" when it is considered from the point of view of any commentator who is willing to delve beneath the subject-matter to the theme.

In one of the most memorable lines of modern poetry, Mr. Alfred Noyes has paid immortal tribute to "the splendor of the indifference of God"; and this magnifi-

cent indifference of an hypothetic Deity to the personal concerns of even His most faithful servants affords the basis for this tragedy by Mr. Ervine. Here is a problem of perennial importance,— a problem which, in fact, has evermore perturbed the foremost religious thinkers of mankind.

In harmony with the famous syllogism of Descartes —"I think: therefore, I am"— Matthew Arnold defined Deity as "the eternal not-ourselves." We are absolutely certain of our own existence; and we are reasonably certain, also, of the existence of another power —"not ourselves"— that dominates the universe. But Matthew Arnold added another phrase to his formula, and, by so doing, appended an uncertainty to a reasonable certainty. His full definition reads, "the eternal not-ourselves that makes for righteousness."

That Deity invariably "makes for righteousness," as righteousness is humanly conceived, is an assumption that cannot be proved by logic and appears to be controverted by experience. The late William James pointed out the difficulty of imagining a God that is less just than the great and noble men that have imagined Him; yet if there is a Supreme Mind that dominates the universe, this Deity may often be accused of dealing unjustly — or seeming to deal unjustly — with individual human beings. Virtue is not always rewarded, nor vice punished, in this world. The rain falls and the lightning strikes upon the good, the bad, and the indifferent. The noblest of mankind is hanged upon a cross, while villains prosper and leave fortunes to a

church. Our own finite sense of justice would be more punctilious.

Great thinkers dream of Deity in the abstract,— as "the eternal not-ourselves"; but ordinary minds, accustomed to concreteness, require an image more tangible than that. They take their own most admirable attributes and imagine a Deity in which these attributes are raised to the *nth* power. Thus God is evermore created in the image of man. Primitive people worship idols with a human body; but this body is represented as larger than life,— more powerful, more terrible, more beautiful. In later stages of civilization, idol-worship is discarded and people progress from imagining a God with a human body to imagining a God with a human mind. This transition has been indicated in Dante's famous statement, "Thus, the Scriptures speak of God as having hands and feet, but mean far otherwise." But, though the tendency of this imaginary process points unerringly toward the ultimate abstract, the average mind — accustomed to concreteness, as birds to the air or fishes to the sea — is incapable of conceiving a Deific Mind that must be something other than a human mind, raised only to the *nth* power.

Thus God is spoken of as He or Him, and not as It; though the impersonal pronoun would be more logically applicable to "the eternal not-ourselves." The common concept of Deity is still — at the stage of thinking to which mankind in general has climbed — conveniently and irremediably anthropomorphic. God is still created in the image of man, and worshiped as a man raised, mentally, to the *nth* power. The wise Goethe

stated that even the most sceptical must be required to admit that the human mind is necessarily anthropomorphic when confronted with the problem of imagining a God.

Thus, men in general have continued to speak of "the eternal not-ourselves" in human terms,— as God the Father, God the Mother, God the Brother, God the Friend. Yet, a moral problem of profound importance arises when this "not-ourselves" neglects to exercise toward human beings the beneficent functions of a parent, or a brother, or a friend. Either this neglect is real, or else it is merely apparent; but, in either case, it is disturbing to men whose faith has been founded on the normal concept of a God endowed with a basically human mind.

Our great religious dramatists, from a very early period, have seized upon this logical dilemma as their theme. Consider *The Book of Job*, for instance. Job is a blameless man, and a faithful servant of his God; yet this very God afflicts him in a manner that must appear incomprehensible to any finite mind. At the climax of *Prometheus Bound*, which was written by Æschylus, the most loftily religious of the tragic poets of ancient Athens, the hero — who represents mankind — though chained to a rock and doomed to endure the torture of vultures gnawing at his liver, talks back to Zeus — who represents "the eternal not-ourselves"— and says, "Although you are more powerful than I, I am more just than you!"

This defiance — so to speak — was flung in the face of God by suffering mankind two thousand and five hun-

dred years ago; and it is not blasphemous to say that God has not yet justified his ways to man throughout the searching of all subsequent poetic literature. *John Ferguson* resembles *The Book of Job* in the basic fact that it exhibits in detail the progressive torture of a blameless man by an "eternal not-ourselves" that the hero himself believes to be not only just in judgment but also kindly in intention.

John Ferguson, a peasant of northern Ireland, is a faithful Christian of the Protestant persuasion. He believes in a personal God who is his Father and his Friend, and he serves this God with absolute fidelity. He strives to love his enemies; he deliberately does good to those who have deliberately done him harm; and, when smitten on the one cheek, he stoically turns the other to his adversaries. Yet the very Deity, or Destiny, in which he trusts — for the names applied to "the eternal not-ourselves" have differed in different centuries and lands — brings down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, accumulating horrors upon horror's head despite the innocence of his deserving. Truly, this Irish peasant might cry aloft with Greek Prometheus, "I am more just than that which tortures me." Instead, he bows his head in penitence and kisses the rod wherewith he is chastised.

John Ferguson, like Job of old, has led a blameless life; but, through an illness incident to his advancing years, he is no longer able to work his farm. His farm is mortgaged to Henry Witherow,— a hard man, who seeks an early opportunity to foreclose the mortgage. John Ferguson appeals to his brother, Andrew, in

America, to send the necessary money to save the farm. Andrew sends the money; but carelessly forgets the mail-day. Therefore, the money-order arrives a fortnight too late to avert the terrible consequences that already have arisen from its non-delivery. When the belated letter comes, a maiden has been ruined, one man has been murdered, another has been jailed, and still another is stalking free with the guilt of murder on his conscience. Thereupon, the ruined girl cries out to her pious father, "God's late, da!": — and this seeming-blasphemous ejaculation is one of the most terrible and tragic lines in modern dramatic literature. Why should God be late, if God is both omniscient and all-powerful? . . . This is the abiding question that none of our prophets nor our poets has ever yet been able to answer to the satisfaction of the seeking soul. Preachers try to put us off with the assurance that God knows better about such little matters than we do, and that we should be satisfied with the assertion that "the eternal not-ourselves" works often through mysterious ways to "make for righteousness." But this answer sounds like something said to quiet children. It lacks the ring of that eternal truth "which moves the sun in heaven and the other stars."

John Ferguson, in form, is a realistic play; and it fulfils its realistic function by reporting faithfully the facts of life as they might have occurred to a typical peasant family in County Down in the period of the eighteen-eighties. But, in spirt, it is a poetic tragedy, whose basic theme is a thing to be considered "not of an age but for all time." There is nothing either new or

old in the idea of a tragic struggle between a just man and an unjust God. This idea was formulated by the dreaming Hebrews of old time; it was illustrated by the ancient Greeks; and it has come down through the ages as the greatest question that has never yet been answered by religious thought.

Mr. Ervine, acknowledging his intellectual alliance with Æschylus and with the author of *The Book of Job*, has provided his drama with a chorus, in accordance with the ancient pattern. He has managed to do this, very cleverly, without disrupting the matter-of-fact appearance of his realistic composition. The play opens and closes with a reading from the English Bible, delivered as a matter of habit by the Bible-reading hero; and at each successive crisis of the action, this pious Irish peasant reaches naturally for his Bible and reads a verse or two aloud. The passages selected are chosen from the Psalms of David; and, æsthetically, they afford to the passage of the drama the same sort of philosophic and poetic commentary that was provided, in ancient days, by the choruses of Æschylus. The plot is carried out by ordinary people; but, every now and then, the Voice of God comments upon the plot through the medium of an ancient but eternal poet,— David, King of Israel.

XXIV

THE JEWISH ART THEATRE

During the last three decades, New York has developed from an essentially American city to a cosmopolitan metropolis. In addition to many other elements, it now contains within itself the largest Jewish population that has ever been assembled in one place within the compass of recorded time. More than a million Jews, most of whom are recent immigrants from eastern Europe, are now congregated in that section of Manhattan which bulges eastward from the Bowery and stretches an arm across the bridge to Williamsburg; and this is a bigger population than Jerusalem could boast of in the heyday of its glory. In the political sense, these people are Americans; for most of them have been naturalized as citizens of the United States, and their votes, as individuals, count just as heavily in a popular election as the votes of Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, or any of the sons of Theodore Roosevelt. But these newcomers to the melting-pot are alien in race, in religion, in language, in customs, and in culture; and a critic of the arts, while not denying the validity of their participation in our body politic, will find it most convenient to consider them as foreigners. They print their own newspapers, and they conduct their own theatre, in a language that

can neither be read nor understood by Americans whose ancestors were born in this country; and, for the average citizen of the older stock, a study of the Ghetto of New York will be just as revelatory of other times and lands as a visit to the most foreign of foreign cities overseas.

The language of this gigantic community of congregated Jews is not Hebrew, but Yiddish. Hebrew is a scholarly and ancient language, like Greek or Latin, that has to be studied from books; but Yiddish is a comparatively recent speech that is still in the making. It is derived from old high German; but the grammar has been debased, the vowel sounds have been vulgarized, and the vocabulary has been cluttered with accretions from the slang of every country to which, in recent centuries, the Jews have wandered. Yiddish has no historic standing as a learned language; and, to foreign ears, it sounds acidulous and sharp. It would seem to be unsuited for literary purposes; yet a considerable Yiddish literature has sprung into existence within the last quarter of a century, both for the library and for the stage; and the geographical center of this new creation is New York. Many of our citizens of older stock may be surprised to learn that, in several communities of Europe which we have never heard of, New York is now revered as the center of Yiddish culture in the current world.

It is an old joke of ours to regard the Jews as primarily avid for money, whereas they are not nearly so penurious as certain races, like the Scots, nor so thrifty as certain other races, like the French. The

fact is that the Jews are primarily avid for culture. They will go to any effort to educate themselves. In New York, they crowd the City College and overflow into Columbia. They are voracious readers and large listeners: they are more like Goethe's Faust, who desired a monopoly of learning, than like Marlowe's Barabbas, who desired a monopoly of wealth. Man to man, they are better educated than their Anglo-Saxon fellow-citizens of equal station; and this fact is proved by their artistic undertakings and accomplishments.

The greatest glory of the largest Jewish city of all time is the Yiddish theatre; and this theatre, though young in years, demands the serious consideration of disinterested critics. The first important Yiddish dramatist to win a place in history was the late Jacob Gordin, whose career attained its climax about twenty years ago. Of Gordin and his works I may speak with a certain authority; for this author was an intimate friend of mine, and I adapted into English — with the valuable assistance of Mr. Samuel Shipman — a play of Gordin's, entitled *The Kreutzêr Sonata,* which subsequently served as a vehicle, for several seasons, for the late Blanche Walsh. Gordin was a Russian Jew; and, when he came to this country, he was obliged to learn the Yiddish language, which was new to him. He was an enormous, bearded creature, with large eyes; and he looked as if he might be carrying a bomb in the pocket of his overcoat. Yet, in reality, he was a kindly and domestic person. He lived, when I first knew him, in the Bronx; and afterwards, he lived in Brooklyn. He was the prolific author of a hundred plays in Yid-

dish, a thousand stories and articles in Russian and German and Yiddish, and fourteen children, who have become Americans; and several evenings a week, he used to deliver lectures on learned subjects, in German or in Yiddish, to educate his people. He made money from his plays; but he always gave his lectures for nothing. His plays were written in pencil, in three-cent copy books, beginning at the back and working forward to the front. He would write you a play, whenever it was needed, in a week or two. The plots were seldom original. Like Molière, Gordin "took his own where he found it"; but he would easily domesticate an old plot from Shakespeare, or from Plautus, or from Alphonse Daudet, among the Jewish people and employ it as a framework for an authentic study of Jewish characters. His plays were always veritably Yiddish before he was through with them.

I used to admire Gordin mainly for his copiousness; for he was a giant, like old Dumas, who never grew tired at all and always got things done. In detail, he was a realist; his observation was meticulous, and his records were exact. I could never judge his dialogue, because I was too lazy to learn Yiddish or even to study out the Hebrew alphabet with which Yiddish is recorded. Twenty years ago, when Gordin ruled the Yiddish stage, his innumerable plays were illustrated, up and down the Bowery, by many able actors — Adler, Kessler, Moskowitz, Mrs. Kalich — all of whom I knew and valued in the adventurous early days of the Yiddish drama. For instance, I was one of the many people from "uptown" whose pleadings finally persuaded

Mrs. Kalich to learn the English language and to transfer her activities to the American stage.

Since Jacob Gordin's day, the Yiddish theatre has developed. It was always true in its report of life; but, latterly, it has grown beautiful as well. An obvious improvement has been made in the departments of scenery and lighting, which were neglected by the busy Gordin as subsidiary matters. New authors, like David Pinski, who have come to us from Europe, are more poetical than Gordin; new actors, like Ben-Ami, are more poetical than Kessler; the Yiddish theatre mounts and mounts.

How does it now stand, in comparison with our "American" theatre, which is controlled by Mr. Shubert and Mr. Erlanger,— both of whom are Jews? This question, when submitted to a disinterested critic, may be answered very quickly. The Yiddish theatre in New York is now superior to the "American" theatre in New York at nearly every point. The American theatre is aimed at money-making; but the Yiddish theatre is aimed at art. The Yiddish theatre is more cultivated and more cultured; and this achievement has been registered by a group of people who have been resident among us for only a quarter of a century. If we choose to regard these people as foreigners, we are condemned to take our hats off to them. But to remove the hat is a salutary exercise; for it reminds us to respect "the grand old name of gentleman."

The marvelous growth of New York along lines that have been indicated has recently been emphasized by the

taking over of the Garden Theatre by an incorporated company entitled The Jewish Art Theatre. Many of us who have not yet attained the dignity of middle age remember the old Garden Theatre as the place where we used to go to see the unforgotten Mansfield and the unforgettable Irving. Now this auditorium is raucous with the sharp and acid accents of the Yiddish language; yet, undeniably, the panorama that is exhibited upon the stage is more beautiful, from the artistic point of view, than most of the visions of life that are offered nightly in the newer theatres that are clustered in the region of Times Square. The growing tendency of the Yiddish people to overflow their foregone boundaries might, imaginably, have been resented, if their advent in Madison Square had not been marked by an appreciable contribution to the art-life of the metropolis. But it would be absurdly uncritical to entertain a prejudice against the Jews, so long as the Jews are able to equal or excel us in the art of the theatre.

The first artistic director of The Jewish Art Theatre was Emanuel Reicher. Mr. Reicher has long been recognized as one of the ablest actors and most progressive directors of the German stage. He was the original exponent — by arrangement with the author — of several leading parts in the plays of Ibsen; and he was one of the initiators of the important movement which resulted in the organization of the *Deutsche Freie Bühne.* In his direction of The Jewish Art Theatre, he has shown us something which requires a salutation.

The Idle Inn [*Die Puste Kretchme*] is a romantic folk-comedy by Peretz Hirshbein, a Russian Jew who

has recently been allured to migrate to New York as the Mecca of Yiddish culture in the current world. The play itself is singularly simple. The name of the heroine is Maite; and Maite loves her cousin, Itzik. But Maite's father, named Bendet, abhors his nephew, Itzik, because he suspects him of being a horse-stealer. Bendet formally arranges a marriage between his daughter, Maite, and Laibish; but Itzik spirits Maite away and elopes with her. Then ensues a primordial scene, set in a lonely place in a forest, in which the passionate love of these two fugitants approaches its fruition. They are separated by a bevy of pursuers, led by their parents; but subsequently, in the end of all, they are reunited.

The whole play is admirably acted. The leading man, Ben-Ami, reveals a sculptural sense in the handling of his body that reminds us of the Græco-Roman; the leading woman, Celia Adler, is passionate and appealing; and a female veteran, named Binah Abramowitz, contributes a mellow performance of the mother of the heroine. The scenery is positively beautiful, and the lighting is impeccable. But the hand of a great directive artist — Emanuel Reicher — is most clearly shown in the second act. This act exhibits the wedding ceremony which celebrates the undesired linking of Maite to Laibish. Throughout my long experience of going to the theatre, I have never seen a crowd so admirably handled. Everybody seemed alive at every moment; and I was reminded, by this ensemble scene, of the lasting reputation left behind them by the Saxe-Meiningen performers, whom I never saw, because their

work was done before my time. No group acting so generally excellent as that of the second act of *The Idle Inn* has been shown, within my memory, at least, upon the American stage.

XXV

A GREAT AMERICAN PLAY

"Beyond the Horizon," by Eugene G. O'Neill

A little while ago, I received a letter from a young gentleman who was serving as stage-director for a stock company in a small provincial city, stating that he "wished to acquire a complete knowledge of the art of writing plays," and asking me to tell him how to do it. It had not occurred to him, apparently, that his question might be difficult to answer. I told him, in reply, that, out of every hundred men who started out with his desire, one or two might eventually find out that they were veritable playwrights, whereas the other ninety-eight or ninety-nine would eventually find out that they were not; and that these discoveries, on the one hand or the other, might be arrived at in a hundred different ways. One man's meat would be another's poison. Some aspirants might be benefited by studying Mr. William Archer's admirable text-book entitled *Play-Making*, others might be aided by taking courses with Professor George Pierce Baker of Harvard or Professor Brander Matthews of Columbia; but still others might do better by following in the footsteps of Mr. George M. Cohan and eschewing universities and libraries.

I receive so many letters of this kind that it has sometimes occurred to me that the best and quickest way to answer them would be to write a book telling frankly what I know of the successive steps in the careers of several playwrights, younger than myself, whose gradual development I have been privileged to witness intimately. If ever I should undertake the writing of this visioned volume, an important chapter would have to be devoted to the work of Eugene G. O'Neill.

Eugene O'Neill has been recognized for several seasons as the ablest author of one-act plays in the United States. This reputation for doing "much in little" was established for him by the Provincetown Players, the Washington Square Players, and other little theatre groups throughout the country; and it was subsequently tested and affirmed through the secondary but more searching medium of publication. The first full-length play by this promising young author has been awaited by the critics and the public with an eagerness that — as usual — has been underestimated by the managers. *Beyond the Horizon*, a tragedy in three acts, was written in 1917. In 1918, an option to produce it was purchased by Mr. John D. Williams, at the suggestion of Mr. George Jean Nathan. Our commercial managers often recognize a good play when they read it; but after paying down five hundred dollars to "tie it up," they seem to have a habit of putting the manuscript in a pigeon-hole, forgetting all about it, and allowing their rights to lapse. Mr. Williams — to whom the public is indebted for many excellent productions — appears, in this particular regard, to

be no wiser than the rest of them. It was owing mainly to the enthusiasm and to the dauntless energy of an exceptionally worthy actor, Mr. Richard Bennett, that this play was hauled out of the pigeon-hole and presented to the public, for the first time, on the afternoon of February 4, 1920.

This long-awaited three-act tragedy was immediately recognized by all the critics as a great play; and the public agreed with the critics in this extraordinary verdict. In the whole history of the American drama, not more than half a dozen plays have been set forth to which this ultimate adjective might be applied. Yet *Beyond the Horizon* is a great play; and Eugene O'Neill, who wrote it, is a great dramatist. He is still very young, and much may be expected of him in the future; yet, should he die to-morrow, these words might be inscribed upon his tombstone,—"Here lies an American author who gave the theatre a great play."

Whenever an artist has achieved greatness, many inconsiderable people hasten forward with anecodotes beginning with the time-worn formula,—"I knew him when . . ." It is not in this spirit that I would presume to write about Eugene O'Neill; but that recent letter from the ambitious stage-director of a stock company in a provincial city reminds me that the solemn and rather futile question which he earnestly propounded was asked of me, some years ago, by the prospective author of *Beyond the Horizon*. I am reminded also that the career of Eugene O'Neill is pregnant with many lessons; and I am tempted now to tell a little of what I know about it, if only as a way of answering

future letters from youths who "wish to acquire a complete knowledge of the art of writing plays."

Eugene O'Neill, though the son of a famous actor, had never shown any aptitude or inclination for the stage. He had been, in many ways, a hard boy to manage. His father had dutifully sent him to college; but, at the outset of his undergraduate career, Eugene had run away and gone to sea. He had roamed the ocean as an ordinary seaman in the forecastle; he had risen, after many months, to the estate of an able seaman in the service of the American Line; he had ultimately been recaptured and brought home. The question now was what to do with him. Eugene was, evidently, a bad boy; and I was asked, if possible, to find some good in him, and to devise some method for developing this good.

I looked the lad over. He had large and dreamy eyes, a slender, somewhat frail, and yet athletic body, a habit of silence, and an evident disease of shyness. I had nothing to suggest. His father decided to adopt a punitive process that approached imprisonment. He left the lad alone throughout the winter in a quiet little boarding-house that overlooks the harbor of New London, and told him to behave himself.

Eugene told me, when I returned to my summer home at New London in the spring, that he had been trying to write one-act plays, and asked me how to do it. "Never mind how plays are written," I advised him. "Write down what you know about the sea, and about the men who sail before the mast. This has been done in the novel; it has been done in the short-story; it has

not been done in the drama. Keep your eye on life,—on life as you have seen it; and to hell with the rest!"

He was always very shy about his writing; and I never pressed him for confidences. At last he asked me to look at some of the things that he had written, with a view to determining a possible disagreement between himself and his father upon the delicate point of his worthiness to be tolerated any longer by an already over-stretched parental patience.

I read some one-act plays about the life at sea, which so few people, in this country of landlubbers, know anything about. I decided not to tell Eugene how good they were, nor how promising they were; but I told his father. Eugene thought it might be a good plan to study play-making with Professor Baker at Harvard. Mr. James O'Neill was hesitant, because this wayward boy had run away from college once before. I put in a plea; and the matter was arranged. I wrote to Professor Baker; and before many months I was gratified to learn that Eugene O'Neill was far and away the best of his pupils. When the one-act plays of Eugene O'Neill began to be produced and published, I was myself astounded at their power.

Two points, in this record, appear to me especially important. The first point is that Eugene O'Neill began his work with a reservoir of real experience to draw from. The best thing that he ever did was to run away from college and to ship before the mast. The second point is that Eugene O'Neill has always written with eyes focussed upon life, instead of writing with eyes focussed on the theatre. A few years ago, he

transferred his residence from New London to Provincetown. In Provincetown he lives, cheaply and primitively, in a little cottage that is rooted in clean earth and offers a wide vista of the teeming and tumultuous sea. He knows nothing, hears nothing, and cares nothing, about the theatre-market that is centered in Times Square. He does not spend his days upon the doormats of the magnates of Forty-Second Street, hoping that they will ultimately pay him five hundred dollars to get rid of him. He does not spend his leisure hours lunching at the Knickerbocker, hoping to pick up an easy job of adapting a French farce to an American setting, or turning a forgotten American farce into a musical comedy. He neither needs nor desires money, because he has never been accustomed to its uses. Like Strickland, in *The Moon and Sixpence*, he can tell the world to go to hell. He can think his thoughts and dream his dreams, in loneliness, beside the surging and suggestive sea; and he can write great dramas which the silly little world that is centered in Times Square can subsequently look upon with wonder.

The inherent greatness of *Beyond the Horizon* is so subtle and elusive that it can scarcely be suggested by a summary of the plot. The play tells once more the dramatic story of a struggle between two brothers of contrasted temperaments; but these antithetic brothers, instead of hating each other — as they did, for instance, in *The Master of Ballantrae* — love each other ardently to the very end of the tragedy. Andrew and Robert Mayo are the two sons of James Mayo,— a typical farmer of New England. Andrew was born

to the soil and has already shown an aptitude for the soil. He loves the farm; he loves to plunge his hands into the cleanliness of the ancestral earth. Robert, however, knows nothing and cares nothing about farming. Ever since his early boyhood, he has entertained a vague ambition to wander far "beyond the horizon," hedged in by the engirdling hills, and to see the wide world that has been sung about in books of poetry. Robert's long-desired chance to break away is presented to him when his maternal uncle — Captain Scott, of a sailing bark named *Sunda* — offers him a berth for a prospective voyage to many islands on the other side of the map. On the eve of his departure, Robert is deterred by the unexpected confession of a neighboring country girl, Ruth Atkins, that she loves him more than she loves his brother Andrew. Robert stays behind, to marry Ruth; and the disappointed Andrew sails away, in Robert's stead, aboard the *Sunda*.

It is soon shown that these decisions were mistaken. Robert — unaccustomed to the soil — makes a mess of the farm. The more practical Andrew makes a success of his undesired career at sea. Ruth soon grows to hate her husband for his inefficiency, and grows to admire the more able brother that she might have married. The conduct of the farm at home drifts downward from disaster to disaster; and, when Andrew at last returns from his long wanderings, it is too late to save the situation. His beloved brother, Robert, is dying of consumption; Robert's wife, the tired Ruth, has developed a longing love for Andrew, whereas this stalwart adventurer in many regions has long ago

forgotten his infatuation for Ruth; and nothing is left for anybody but to let the dead past bury its dead and to mourn a multitude of might-have-beens. As spectators, we are invited to witness the creeping decay of a family and to acknowledge that nothing could possibly be done to avert the catastrophe that was predestined. There is no villain in the drama: the guiltless characters are destroyed by the antipathy of their environment.

This play is peculiar in the fact that its effects are derived exclusively from the requirements of character and are never derived from the suggestions of theatric artifice. There is scarcely a moment in the drama which might be praised for sheer theatrical adroitness. The author evidently knows enough about the theatre's ways to scorn the usual expedients that are productive of applause at every curtain-fall. What he cares about is life — and a patterning of life as he has seen it — and he cares not at all for the conventional formulas that may be current in Times Square, where the horizon of the dramatist is more restricted than it is in Provincetown.

The people of this play are absolutely real and utterly alive. The action is absorbing from the outset, and, though slow in movement, is accumulative in its tensity. The dialogue is masterly in its simplicity and in its strict fidelity to character. Here is a play of which Americans may well be proud. It is the first great tragedy that has been contributed to the drama of the world by a native American playwright.

XXVI

BOOTH TARKINGTON AS A PLAYWRIGHT

It is both a privilege and a pleasure — as they say in after-dinner speeches — to welcome Mr. Booth Tarkington, after many years of waiting, into the limited group of authors who have made authentic contributions to our American dramatic literature. The winner of the Pulitzer Prize for the best American novel of 1918 has long been recognized as one of our leading men of letters; but ever since he wrote *The Man from Home,* with Mr. Harry Leon Wilson, his plays — whether planned alone or in collaboration — have been nearly always disappointing. The very critics who have praised most heartily his novels and short-stories have regretted, with the friendliest concern, the apparent obfuscation of his talent when he has turned it to the service of the stage. Though a first-rate fiction-writer, without question, Mr. Tarkington has hitherto appeared as a third-rate playwright. But recently, in *Clarence,* he has written a comedy that is equally admirable as drama and as literature; and the friendliest and most regretful of the critics of his past performances upon the stage have tossed their hats aloft in a loud hurrah for the ingratiating Tark! He has learned at last to launch over the footlights the magic that he has long been able to convey through the less complicated medium of the printed page.

Hitherto, the trouble with the Tarkington plays has been twofold; for, in the first place, the author has not controlled his audiences, and, in the second place, the author has not controlled his actors. Yet the actors and the public are the two subsidiary factors to an acted play that must be dominated by the author if he aspires to be respected as a dramatist. In the case of *The Man from Home*, for instance, the audience was permitted to run away with the piece and to reverse the satirical intention of the authors. Both Mr. Tarkington and Mr. Wilson have repeatedly asserted to their friends that, in this play, they meant to poke fun at a typical man from Kokomo by projecting him incongruously against a conventional background of European aristocracy, and that they were very much surprised when our provincial public proceeded to regard this amiable roughneck as a sort of patriotic hero. If Mr. Tarkington, a dozen years ago, had been more familiar with the psychological reactions of the theatre-going public, he would have understood that this reversal of his original intention was the one thing that turned a poor play from a failure into an astonishing success; and if Mr. Tarkington and Mr. Wilson had been more familiar, at that time, with the technique of the drama, they would have understood the reason why the public turned the whole thing topsy-turvy,—which was merely that, whereas they took the pains to draw their man from Kokomo with the uttermost fidelity to life, they neglected to play fair with the other side of the contention and allowed themselves to represent the European aristocracy by a group of

conventional lay-figures made of straw. Mr. Tarkington has often apologized to his friends for the popular success of *The Man from Home* and has insisted that the sins of the public should not be heaped upon his shoulders and those of his collaborator; but any playwright who permits the audience to run away with his piece and to overturn his own intention is not a master of his craft.

Stimulated to renewed activity by the huge success of this initial effort, Messrs. Tarkington and Wilson — if one may judge the matter solely on the basis of the evidence — proceeded, for several seasons, to regard the theatre as a joke. At any rate, these exceptionally able novelists turned out a subsequent series of bad plays in quick succession and seemed to be surprised when these left-handed pieces went down, one by one, to speedy failure. Thereafter came a time when these two collaborators both renounced the theatre as a bunch of sour grapes and decided to devote their sole attention to the more " artistic " task of writing novels.

But Mr. Tarkington, despite his real success in the realm of published fiction, was never cured completely of his hankering for reputation in the theatre. Alone, or with collaborators, he returned to the task of making plays, again and yet again; and the fact that he had grown to regard this task with a new seriousness became evident when he began to remonstrate against the adverse verdicts published by his many personal friends among the professional critics of our current drama. He tried so earnestly and tried so hard to make a play that should be worthy to be classed in the same artistic

category with his own best novels and short-stories that, at times, he convinced himself that he had turned the trick and allowed himself to be distressed when he received an apparently habitual batch of adverse reviews.

We must now consider the second difficulty that has hitherto obstructed the career of Mr. Tarkington as a dramatist. He has not only failed to control his audiences; but he has also neglected to control his actors. With an artistic intention in his mind, he has frequently permitted this intention to be vitiated by miscasting or by other manifestations of incompetence in the employment of the current theatre as a medium of expression. It is not sufficient for an author so worthy of regard as Mr. Tarkington to deliver a manuscript to a producing manager and let the matter go at that. A dramatist should love the theatre well enough to spend his days and nights within its walls throughout the perilous period of rehearsals; and he must finally be held responsible if the wrong actors are permitted to deliver to the public a wrong interpretation of his characters. Mr. Tarkington has sometimes complained because his regretful critics have judged his efforts for the theatre on the basis of the shown performance instead of on the basis of his unrehearsed manuscript; but the business of the dramatic critic is to interpret what he sees on the stage, not what he might have seen if the author had selected other intermediary artists to convey his message across the footlights.

Clarence is, far and away, the best piece that Mr.

Tarkington has ever written; and this veritable artist who — years ago and for a little time — seemed tempted to regard the theatre in a mood of airy cynicism should be prompted by the huge success of *Clarence* to reward an ever-waiting public with other comedies as fine as this. Despite its title, this comedy is primarily a study of a family; and to draw a life-like picture of a family is a task of greater difficulty than to draw half a dozen life-like portraits of unrelated individuals.

To students of psychology, the family must always remain one of the most interesting and one of the most puzzling of social institutions. It is natural for human beings to seek and choose their friends. The search is life-long; and choices are continually made from childhood up. Out of a thousand people, we pick one as a companion because he is more congenial to us than any of the others. With him we choose to share uncounted hours, and count those moments wasted when we are interrupted by any of the multitude of our acquaintances. Friendship is so rare and wonderful a thing that any one is lucky who is able, in an average life-time, to discover half a dozen different friends. But the family throws people together by the unreasonable accident of consanguinity, and often holds them together without choice. Sometimes they are friends; more often they are not; and, in the latter and more common case, the institution of the family imposes upon them a fictitious pretense of friendship. Brothers and sisters who are not at all congenial and who never in the world would have chosen each other as companions are brought up together in an intimacy

which, under these circumstances, might almost be regarded as indelicate. More often still, an utter lack of friendship exists between parents and their children. In the first place, they are too far apart in age to understand each other; and in the second place, since most families are either rising or declining through the generations, a son of twenty-five and a father of fifty belong very often to different levels of society. Under these circumstances, crabbed age and youth cannot live together. The imposition of an unnatural intimacy upon people who are not congenial with each other results in a great deal of insincerity; and insincerity is bad for the development of human character.

Yet the family is so respected as an institution that very few novelists and dramatists have had the courage to describe it as a breeder of discontent and a deforming force in the development of individual character. Sir Arthur Pinero has so described it in *His House in Order*, and again in that bitter and sardonic masterpiece, *The Thunderbolt*, which failed in the theatre because the average spectator regarded it as too unpleasant. Mr. Bernard Shaw, also, has more than once set up the social institution of the family as a target for satirical attack. Mr. Tarkington, in *Clarence*, is more genial. He has shown us a family with all its faults; yet the individual members of this family are all distinctly likable, and we gather the impression that it is rather good for them to be forced to live together in an atmosphere of uncongeniality. Be it ever so hateful, there is no place like home; and the constant

bickerings of the Wheelers are made tolerable by the fact that each member of this family is always able to laugh at the foibles of the others.

The Wheeler family consists of Mr. Wheeler, a wealthy business man of middle age who lives in Englewood, New Jersey; his son Bobby and his daughter Cora, both of whom are in their 'teens; his second wife, who is too young to be their step-mother; and a level-headed governess who is too pretty to collaborate without embarrassment in the necessarily intimate task of bringing up his children. None of these people are capable of understanding any of the others; and none of them would have chosen the others for friends if the accident of consanguinity had not flung them together in an intimacy that is hard to bear. Mr. Wheeler is able to conduct his large and intricate business without difficulty; but he is utterly unable to conduct his family. There is never a peaceful moment in his house in Englewood. Bobby has been expelled from three schools for shooting craps, and is now threatened with a suit for breach of promise for having kissed the house-maid; and Cora has compromised herself by running off to a midnight party at the country-club with a grass-widower whom she regards romantically as the great love of her life. When the distressed father of these madcap children confers confidentially with the governess about the best means to bring them to their senses, he excites the unreasonable jealousy of his second wife. Even in his office in New York, this magnate unperturbed by business worries cannot find a moment's peace; for his sanctuary is invaded by the various

members of his family, and its customary atmosphere of calm efficiency is disturbed by raucous bickerings and unreasonable tears.

In a desperate moment, Mr. Wheeler impulsively decides to try an experiment which might have been recommended to his mind by some wise and calm philosopher. This experiment is nothing more nor less than to introduce an utter stranger into the bosom of his family and to find out what will happen when the jangled members of his household are required to adjust themselves to this new and unknown personality. Fortunately, an utter stranger is conveniently at hand in the person of a slouching private, recently discharged from the artillery, who has been sitting around for a couple of days in Mr. Wheeler's outer office, meekly asking for a job. His given name is Clarence; but his last name remains a mystery till the end of the play, because, in the first act, he is interrupted over and over again by Mr. Wheeler's bumptious children while he is attempting to give it, for purposes of record, to Mr. Wheeler's secretary.

Clarence is soon installed in Mr. Wheeler's household, in a status that hovers vaguely between that of a servant and that of a guest. He is adored by Bobby and by Cora, as a Hero of the Great War; and the admiration of these young romantics is not lessened when Clarence tells them modestly that he was dragged into the army by the draft, that his entire term of service was spent in driving army mules in Texas instead of driving Germans through the Argonne Forest, and that his wound-stripe was earned when he was ac-

cidentally shot in the liver at target-practice. These eager adolescents choose Clarence as a welcome repository for their confidences, because he has been in the army and has seen life as it really is; and the unheroic private with the ailing liver listens quietly to their intimate confessions and gives them the same sort of worldly-wise advice that they would not accept from their father, their step-mother, or their governess, or indeed from any other person than an utter stranger.

Clarence quickly shows himself to be a handy man about the house, and makes himself equally useful as a plumber, a piano-tuner, and an entertaining player on a borrowed saxaphone. He is soon adored by the dissatisfied step-mother of the family, who is persuaded by this new interest in her nervous life to renounce her habitual tyranny of tears. The governess finds it more difficult to make him out; but that is merely because she loves him at first sight, and hates herself for fearing that she might be fool enough to feel afraid that she might love him, if, of course, she were not such a steady-headed governess,— a woman, in other words, whose calm sagacity could always be depended on to arrest the slightest hint of waywardness in her emotions. It is almost superfluous to report that this sagacious hesitant is the woman doomed by destiny to marry Clarence at the end of the play.

The modest and mysterious Clarence becomes more and more charming as the comedy proceeds. It is essential to the pattern of the play that the richness of his personality should be revealed only gradually to the audience, as this richness is presented, bit by bit, to

the appreciative comprehension of the various members of the Wheeler family. Everybody, on both sides of the footlights, is agreeably surprised when the slouching person who had seemed so ill at ease in an ill-fitting army uniform comports himself as an indubitable gentleman when he suddenly appears in a newly-purchased suit of evening dress. Who is this plumber and pianotuner who is so sympathetic that he understands all confidences and can straighten out the most intricate of human entanglements without apparent effort? It turns out, in the end, that Clarence is a famous entomologist and that his final name is Smith; and the anti-climax of the second revelation relieves the climax of the first. Clarence, in the good old English phrase, is both a scholar and a gentleman; and though, in the end of all, he steals away the governess — after the most delicious proposal-scene that has been written by any dramatist within the memory of the present commentator — he leaves the Wheeler family not only happier but wiser for his passing.

Clarence — as the ticket-buying public immediately proved — is a play whose merits are easy to enjoy; but it is not a piece that can be easily catalogued by the critical commentator and assigned to a definite place on the five-foot shelf of plays to be remembered. One would hesitate to call *Clarence* a great comedy, because it seems to lack the bulk and weight that are suggested by the connotation of this ultimate adjective; but it is a very fine comedy; and in the drama, the attribute of fineness is even rarer than the attribute of greatness. To write a "big scene" in which a tragic

heroine chews the carpet is easier by far than to write a running current of delightful comment on the humorous events that crop up every day in a typical American family. Mr. Tarkington's characters, in *Clarence*, are manifestly true. He has been especially successful in delineating Bobby and Cora,— the spoiled children of the Wheeler family; but this achievement, perhaps, is not surprising, in view of the fact that Mr. Tarkington has long been recognized as our leading literary authority on the psychology of adolescence. The piece is more than adequately patterned; but a slight shuffling of the order of the situations might possibly result in an appreciable augmentation of theatrical effectiveness. In a couple of cases, incidents that call down curtains might better have been disposed of in the middle of an act,— yielding prominence of place to other situations that are clearly more emphatic. But the dialogue is so delightful that it tempts the commentator to repeat that enthusiastic phrase of Ruskin's,—"beyond all praise." It is continuously humorous; yet not a line of it could be quoted as a "joke," apart from the context. The funniest things that are said appear to spring spontaneously from the characters under spur of the successive situations; and the audience laughs, not for the easy reason that the puppets are so witty, but for the rarer reason that they are so human. In *Clarence*, Mr. Tarkington has succeeded, from the outset to the end, in evoking from the public the rich response of recognition.

So fine a play as this, which does not even aspire to be considered great, may finally be classed in the same

category with such minor classics as *The Mollusc*, by Hubert Henry Davies. A little thing done well is more impressive than a bigger effort bungled. *Clarence*, in both bulk and weight, is but a little thing. So is a cameo; so is a pearl. But the surging tide that washes down huge images in sand cannot dissolve a pearl.

XXVII

THE ATHENIAN DRAMA AND THE AMERICAN AUDIENCE

Before the invention of printing, there were few books in the world; but all of these were worth reading. So long as every extra copy of a literary work had to be written out by hand on parchment, a certain care was exercised lest this lengthy labor should be wasted over words that were ephemeral. The Romans, Greeks, and Hebrews were human like ourselves, and liable to human error; they must have uttered, every day, the usual amount of trash, and this trash must have been passed about, from mouth to mouth, among the masses; but the ancients did not write it down. They allowed their trivial words to die,— unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown; and they recorded in their libraries only those more memorable words that were luminous with intimations of immortality.

The library of Alexandria was burned; Herculaneum was buried beneath an overwhelming flood of lava; and comparatively little now remains to us of ancient literature. But what remains is not "ancient," in the narrow sense; and nearly all of it is really "literature," — that is to say [in the noble phrase of Emerson] a record of "man thinking" and expressing his thoughts in unwitherable words. The invention of printing, and the enactment of that modern law which compels

everybody, willy-nilly, to go to school and learn to read, has led to a widespread circulation of recorded utterances; but how many of these documents are "literature"? And those of us who ply the pen so busily in these days of rapid printing might profitably pause, every now and then, to ask ourselves whether we have ever written a single sentence that deserves to be engraved on granite and preserved from the erosion of innumerable future centuries. How much of our contemporary writing will be accepted finally as "literature," in the leisure of all time?

The ancients felt a more reverent respect for books and authors than we entertain to-day; but they had more reason for this feeling. They were not poisoned by a state of things that accords a million readers every morning to the hirelings of Mr. William Randolph Hearst, and reduces John Milton to what — in the profane vocabulary of our friends, the French — is eloquently called "the name of a name." The ancients saw things in perspective and proportion. They never pretended — not even on the eve of a popular election — that "all men are created equal": they announced, instead, that certain men were nobler than their fellows and were worthy, by inherent right, of being listened to attentively. The Greeks gave prizes for literary prowess; and, when a man had won a public prize for authorship, he was erected to the aristocracy and considered as a leading citizen.

The ancients regarded their greatest authors as divine, and spread abroad the legend that these supermen had spoken to mankind with the authentic voice

of God. The Hebrews accepted Isaiah not only as a poet but also as a prophet, and claimed that he wrote better than he knew. The Romans believed that Virgil was not merely a perfect artist, but also an unconscious mouthpiece for the Deity of deities; and, after the slow passage of a thousand years, the greatest composition of the greatest man that ever lived was immediately called, not by himself, but by his readers, *The Divine Comedy*. There was no real reason — on the other hand — why this title should not have been selected by Dante himself; since he has told us more than once, with the serenity of perfect confidence, that the things he had to say were suggested not by his own mind, but by the irresistible and overwhelming inspiration of all the things that are.

We are living now in an age of infidelity, when it is popular to laugh at high and far-off images of holy things; but we have no reason to dismiss as merely credulous the belief of our forefathers that their greatest poets were inspired from above. Without departing from the region of the intellect, it would be easy enough to prove that Dante is indeed, in a certain sense, "divine"; and there is also a reasonable motive for accepting several of the Hebrew writings, which have been gathered helter-skelter after many accidents of time into the canonical fold of the Old Testament, as authentic utterances of some power that is greater than ourselves.

The Romans held a "superstition"—to repeat a word that has grown current in our present period of cynicism — that Virgil was so wise that he had hidden

away an answer to every imaginable human problem in some passage of his *Æneid;* and common men in need of guidance were advised to open his heroic poem blindfold, to place a finger on an accidental passage, and to read this passage as a mystical, oracular response to their imaginative inquisition.

This pagan incantation is not yet out-moded. It is still possible to trust the ancient writers for an answer to our modern questionings. And, in these times of trouble, we may profitably turn to the tragic poets of the period of Pericles.

Why is it that any so-called "modern" play which is "revived" after an interval of only twenty or thirty years seems nearly always irretrievably "old-fashioned,"— while any adequate production of a play originally written in the age of Pericles appears always — in the phrase of Robert Browning —"strange and new"?

This question is not difficult to answer. The Greeks — in contemplating any subject for a work of art — sought only and sought always for inklings of eternity. By imagination, they removed their topics "out of space, out of time," and regarded them from the point of view of an absolute and undisrupted leisure. They sought, in any subject, not for transitory hintings of the here and now, but always and only for indications of the absolute and undeniable. By deliberate intention, they wrote "not of an age but for all time."

Another point to be recalled is that the tragic dramatists of ancient Athens were never tempted to pursue the *ignis fatuus* of novelty. No playwright — in those

high and far-off days — was ever expected, or permitted, to invent a story. The Athenian dramatists dealt only with tales that had already been familiar to the public for a thousand years. Their function was — as artists — to extract a new and unexpected truth from the elucidation of an ancient fable, and not to catch the light attention of the public by the sudden flaunting of some flag of novelty. The augustness of Greek criticism may be measured by the fact that the *Medea* of Euripides took only a third prize in Athens in the year 431 B. C. It was probably too "modern" or too "revolutionary" to satisfy the honorable judges who accorded the first prize to Euphorion, the son of Æschylus.

If Margaret Anglin had accomplished nothing else, she would be entitled to a vote of gratitude for proving that there is a large and eager public in this country which is willing to pay money for the privilege of seeing the tragic dramas of the Greeks. For Miss Anglin's first performance in New York of the *Electra* of Sophocles, on the afternoon of February 6, 1918, the house was crowded to the roof; and it must be remembered that Carnegie Hall is capable of seating more than three thousand people. Miss Anglin was required, by a popular demand that was literally undeniable, to offer half a dozen repetitions of the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Medea* of Euripides; and, for each of these matinée performances the gross receipts amounted, in round numbers, to six thousand dollars. There is always a great public for great art; and this Miss Anglin knows.

She has taught our public also that "Sophocles" and "Euripides" are not dead names, to be listed merely in card catalogues of dusty libraries, but living names of living playwrights, fitted to arouse the emotions of a public young and eager for sensation. Like all great artists, Miss Anglin is gifted, quite uncommonly, with common sense. She understands the simple point — which has escaped the notice of innumerable scholars and professors — that the Athenian public attended the drama not in answer to the call of duty but in answer to the call of pleasure. The aim of the theatre is not instruction; it is merely entertainment; and the most high-minded dramatist tries only to overwhelm the members of his audience with an awareness of "God being with them when they know it not." Euripides and Sophocles are not aloof and distant, like the "high-brows" of this present time; for, in their own day, they fraternized with common men and sought to entertain the inarticulate but none-the-less appreciative "gallery" of Helots who could neither read nor write.

In ancient Athens, the original production of a play was an event that is comparable, in contemporary terms, to the staging, in New York, of the opening game in a series to determine the World's Championship in professional baseball. In the year 431 B. C., the first prize for tragedy was accorded to Euphorion; the second to Sophocles; and the third to Euripides, for the composition of four plays, one of which was the *Medea*. When these prize-winning plays were acted, the whole town shut up shop and took a holiday, and

sat upon the southern slope of the Acropolis to see what could be seen, and to enjoy whatever happened to be offered for enjoyment. These people — human like ourselves — did not congregate by thousands in pursuit of education: they assembled naturally in pursuit of entertainment. They went to the theatre to be interested and excited and enthralled; and — in that typical season which is numbered now by scholarly historians as the first year of the eighty-seventh Olympiad — Euphorion and Sophocles and Euripides earned the prizes they had won, by compelling the applause of a heterogeneous public which never numbered less than twenty thousand heads, for any one performance.

Miss Anglin, having seized the spirit of Greek tragedy, has decided that the thing to be pursued is not the interest of archæology but the interest of immediate theatrical appeal. She has handled the recorded texts of Euripides and Sophocles as if these ancient dramatists were contemporary and were standing at her elbow throughout the tentative period devoted to rehearsals. She has never allowed herself to think of either of these authors as any less alive than Sir Arthur Pinero or Mr. Augustus Thomas, or any less responsive to the predictable reactions of a contemporary audience. She has discarded the mask, and the cothurnus, and many other minor and mechanical conventions of the ancient drama; but she has preserved the wonder and the sting.

Miss Anglin's interpretations of Euripides and Sophocles were first disclosed in the summer of 1915, in the Greek Theatre at Berkeley, California. Rumors

began immediately to drift eastward that she had "discovered" a couple of "young authors" who promised, in due time, to be "accepted" on Broadway.

The present writer, among others in the east, received letters, at the time, which told the tale. Miss Anglin had imagined, for the end of the *Electra*, a bit of "business" that was thoroughly in keeping with the high intention of the dramatist. Orestes, according to the orderly progression of the play, has entrapped Ægisthus, and challeneged him to fight a duel for his life. The young avenger marches the elder murderer off stage, to the blood-bedewed halls of Agamemnon. From this heroic region, beyond the boundaries of the visible scene, there comes a noise of the clash of steel on steel and of the groans and grunts of supermen engaged in mortal combat. This sound is listened to by lone Electra, clad in dismal rags, who looms before the audience as a pillar of cloud, awaiting fearfully the outcome of the combat between the man who is her brother and the man who is her father's murderer. Off stage, there arises, in due time, a cry of agony, and then there comes a silence and a pause. Then, from out the portal of the house of Agamemnon, is hurled the sword of the vanquished. This token clatters, hurtling, down a stairway of enormous length. Electra shudders away from the symbol of defeat. Then, stealthily, she climbs down many steps, to examine it with anguished curiosity. With a wild cry, she catches up and flings the thing aloft: for she has recognized it as the sword of the hated murderer, Ægisthus. Then, at last, she dashes it beneath her feet, and tramples on

it with a tardy sense of triumph. This point of high dramatic tensity concludes the play.

When Miss Anglin first presented the *Electra* of Sophocles in Berkeley, California, this final moment was received with utter silence. No hands were clapped together in the entire auditorium. A friend of mine was standing in the wings; and he told me — in a letter that was written at the time — that he heard Miss Anglin say aloud, "I've failed: — My God, I've failed!" Then, after an appreciable pause, there came a noise that sounded like the rushing of the tide at Mont Saint Michel. This noise was compounded of the cheering from ten thousand throats. Louder and louder grew the acclamation, until it seemed to shake the skies. Then, suddenly, the stage itself was assaulted by hundreds and hundreds of clamorous spectators. They swarmed about Miss Anglin and strove to touch her finger-tips. One old man, whose face was bathed in tears, tore his own hat into shreds and tossed the pieces high into the air. . . . That was what he wished to say in tribute to a dramatist who had been dead and buried for two dozen centuries.

A critical comparison between the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Medea* of Euripides is apparently demanded in the present context; but this comparison is difficult to make. For many centuries, it has been assumed, as a commonplace of commentary, that Sophocles was a greater playwright than his younger rival. Yet this assertion has been challenged by such ancient critics as Aristotle and such modern critics as Goethe. The final truth appears to be that Sophocles was more ab-

stract and general in his formulation of the records of experience, and that Euripides was more concrete and more particular. In consequence of this distinction, Euripides now seems more "modern," and Sophocles now appears to be more "classical."

To my own mind, the distinction between the two may be symbolized most quickly by reference to the cognate art of architecture. Sophocles reminds me of the Parthenon: and Euripides reminds me of the Corinthian temple at Nîmes. The strength of Euripides is based upon the particularity of his appeal to those personal and individual reactions which, in every period, appear to be most timely; but the power of Sophocles is founded on the generality of his appeal to emotions which are absolute, and therefore beyond the reach of any hint of time.

Euripides, in his *Medea* — a comparatively early composition which, two thousand three hundred and fifty years ago, was accorded only a third prize in Athens — proclaimed and trumpeted the new insurgence of downtrodden woman against dominating man. Some of the choruses of this play, as translated by Professor Gilbert Murray, appear to have been written a year or two ago, as "feminist" documents inspired by the modern insurrection of subjected women. In listening to lines like these, it is difficult for any auditor to realize that Euripides has been dead for more than twenty centuries: he appears to be, with such a keen degree of militance, a prophet of our own contemporary period.

It would be easy enough to argue that Sophocles, in

his *Electra*, has surpassed, in sheer dramatic power, the appeal that was subsequently made by Euripides, in the *Medea*. But this traditional and scholarly adjudication would be divorced from the verdict of the contemporary public. As a matter of record, there can scarcely be a doubt that the theatre-going public of New York prefers the *Medea* of Euripides to the *Electra* of Sophocles. For one thing, our modern audience understands more easily the motives of Medea, who is actuated by jealousy and by the "fury of a woman scorned," than the motives of Electra, who is actuated by the incentive of blood vengeance and by an irrefragable belief in "that eternal not-ourselves that makes for righteousness." And, for another thing, the modern audience is moved more easily by emotions that seem to have been dated from the present hour than by emotions that seem to be untimely, because they have originally been imagined without reference to any thought of time. Euripides still appears to us, as he seemed, long ago, to Aristotle, "the most tragic of the poets"; but Sophocles is more august and monumental in the architecture of his plays.

XXVIII

A REMINISCENCE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

"*Guibour*"

The Neighborhood Playhouse, at 466 Grand Street, New York, has been the Mecca of many memorable pilgrimages ever since its doors were first opened to the questing public by the beneficence of Alice and Irene Lewisohn; but nothing that has ever been shown at this theatre has excelled in interest the presentation of *Guibour*, a French miracle play of the fourteenth century, which attracted overflowing audiences three nights a week throughout the months of January, February, and March, 1919. This play was first acted in the year 1352 — precisely two hundred and fifty years before the initial performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* — by a confraternity called the Puys, which was partly ecclesiastical and partly literary in its character. It was planned as one of forty items in a cycle of religious plays, all celebrating in one way or another the miracles of the Madonna; and its content is indicated by the traditional sub-title, *Un Miracle de Notre Dame: Comment Elle Garda Une Femme d'Estre Arsée.*

The recent resurrection of this medieval drama was sponsored and directed by Yvette Guilbert, who also played the title part and thereby made her first appear-

ance as an actress on the English-speaking stage. As an actress, Madame Guilbert, of course, is not so utterly incomparable as she is within the limits of her own unique and special art as a *diseuse,* and her ear for English is not by any means so fine as her ear for French; yet, despite the incidental handicaps to which she willingly submitted, she delivered a performance which was monumentally impressive. Representative artists of this caliber are not born more than once in a quarter of a century; and it is nearly so long as that since Modjeska died and Duse retired from the stage. In this performance, Madame Guilbert was supported by many able and enthusiastic amateurs, including the Misses Lewisohn, the versatile young artist, Rollo Peters, L. Rogers Lytton, and Margherita Sargent. No professional company could possibly have rendered this old drama with so many indubitable indications of a genuine love for the occasion.

The scenery and costumes for the production of *Guibour* were designed by Robert Edmond Jones; and, despite the current fame of this successful artist for the stage, it may be said with candor that he has never done anything more fine, in composition or in color, than his imaginative investure of this relic of a by-gone age. The incidental music was gathered by Madame Guilbert from her ample library of medieval sources; and this music was beautifully rendered by choral singers trained by Edith Quaile. Especially impressive was the singing of Richards Hale, a young baritone endowed by nature with a gorgeous voice and equipped by study with a trained ability to use this great voice

to the best advantage. The English version of the old French text was ably written by Anna Sprague MacDonald.

The presentation of *Guibour* was, in every respect, so satisfactory that the only matter which requires comment from the critical reviewer is the inherent importance of this rather artless composition, which was written down by some nameless and forgotten author — or syndicate of authors — more than half a thousand years ago.

In the first place, it may be stated that any veritable revelation of medieval art is greatly to be desired in this country at the present time. Alone among the mighty nations to which the predetermination of the future of the world has been allotted by the falling of the dice of destiny, our own country stands naked as a nation without a past. The ordinary citizens of England, France, or Italy, as they go about their daily business, walk beneath the shadow of many monuments of the middle ages, and are constantly reminded of the past by some gigantic relic like the cathedral of Canterbury, the cathedral of Amiens, the cathedral of Siena. In this country, we have inherited no cognate monuments of a world that used to be. Our most venerable buildings date merely from the seventeenth century; and most of these are being ruthlessly torn down in the interest of "progress." Ancestrally, we Americans, if we count our lineage from a common Adam, are just as old as the English, the French, or the Italians; but we are more in need of opportunities to recollect our ancient origin than our cousins overseas.

In actuality, the modern world is too much with us; and it is difficult for us to trace back the tendrils of our best imaginings to the rich, dark soil of the world that used to be. To remind us vividly of the state of mind of our forefathers, we need a resurrection of the medieval drama more emphatically than an exhibition of this sort could possibly be needed by the contemporary public of Italy or France or England. *Guibour* is exceedingly important to the theatre-going public of New York, by virtue of the fact that it reminds the audience that there was a theatre-going public in the civic squares of France more than half a thousand years ago, and that the world was very much alive before the date of the discovery of America.

In studying any work of medieval origin, we should remember always that the art of the middle ages was calculated carefully to appeal to a public that was illiterate. Throughout the thousand years which extended from the triumph of Christianity over the Roman world, in the fourth century, to the beginnings of the Renaissance of ancient culture, in the fourteenth century, nine-tenths of all the people who were born and buried in Europe passed through life without ever learning to read or write. Literacy was reserved almost exclusively for the clergy; and, practically speaking, the only people who could read and write were dignitaries of the Church. This, of course, is the main historic reason for the absolute supremacy of the Church over the minds and hearts of the common people of the middle ages. Any ordinary citizen was required to believe what was told him by the priests, because he

was cut off, by his lack of education, from the privilege of appealing, through any other medium than the Church, to the written records of the accumulated wisdom of mankind.

The Church, as the sole custodian of literary learning and the chosen teacher of the vast illiterate populace throughout a thousand years, rendered in the main a good account of its stewardship. The people could not read; the people had to be taught; therefore, it was necessary to teach them through the easily intelligible symbols of concrete art. Here we have the motive for that tremendous efflorescence of Gothic architecture which forces modern critics to their knees to pay obeisance to the middle ages. John Ruskin was happily inspired with a phrase when he called the greatest monument of Gothic architecture "the Bible of Amiens." It was indeed a Bible, a sacred book made up of many sermons writ in stone; and these sermons were so concrete, and therefore so intelligible to the unlettered mind, that it might be actually said that any one who ran might read them. All that the Church could tell about the past, the present, and the future, the miracle of life and the mystery of death, and that triune ideal of Beauty, Truth, and Righteousness — three in one and one in three — was trumpeted through solid stone to all the passing generations that were born and buried within the visible radius of this towering cathedral.

Although the drama, as an art, had been excluded from the world for more than a thousand years — and that is the main reason, the present scribe is fain to

think, why the centuries in question have been frequently labeled by learned historians as "the dark ages"—the Church decided, in the twelfth century, to reinvent the drama, as the most effective medium through which the illiterate public might be convinced of the essential truth of many myths and legends of what may be described most quickly as the "propaganda" of medieval Christianity. This newly reinvented drama immediately scored a popular success; and the enthusiasm of the public was so obvious that, when the daily overturning of the calendar had whispered its way into the fourteenth century, the Church and its affiliated organizations of representative men of letters were actively engaged, in nearly every European country, in pushing the drama as the most direct, and therefore the most effective, means of inculcating certain fundamental truths into the minds of an uneducated but eager and avid public.

To this enthusiastic season of the fourteenth century, *Guibour* belongs. Its characteristics as a work of art are similar to those of any representative example of medieval architecture. It is simple, homely, direct, concrete, and — from the point of view of the more sophisticated modern mind — naïve. This old play is surprisingly alive, because it reveals an almost astonishing intimacy with life as it was actually lived in that far century which brought it forth; but, at certain moments when it appears to appeal for a degree of credence that is difficult for the modern commentator to concede, we should remember that it was originally written for a public that had never read a book.

In Victor Hugo's monumental novel, *Notre Dame de Paris,* there is a famous passage in which a medieval priest, holding in one hand a copy of a newly printed book and sweeping the other hand in a gesture toward the vast cathedral, announces, "*Ceci tuera celà!*" The invention of printing was destined to supersede the function of medieval architecture. It is no longer necessary to erect Bibles in stone to edify a public that is fed with information by newspapers that issue eight or ten editions every day. Our modern laws, which impose a common-school education on every individual, without even consulting his desires, bequeath a greater potency upon the printed words of a propagandist than can ever be achieved by any such announcement of religious theory through the medium of lasting stone as has been imagined by the anachronistic projectors of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. The popular promulgation of the printed word has swiftly undermined the more specific and more concrete appeal of medieval art. "*Ceci tuera celà*": "printing will kill architecture": this prediction has been justified by the event.

But any example of the drama of the middle ages should be judged by a contemporary critic not according to the theoretic terms of our modern printed literature but according to the terms of that more explicit medieval architecture which was designed to convey eternal messages to a running public unacquainted with the special craft of reading. Any such expression must be homely, and intimate, and quite unblushingly naïve. *Guibour* fulfils with ease these rather remarka-

ble requirements. It is so simple in its thought that any child could understand it; it is so homely in its method that it reveals a memorable picture of the daily life of a French town in the middle ages; and it is so deliciously naïve in mood that it calls forth the sort of sympathetic smile with which we accompany the patting on the head of a lovely and appealing child.

One of the most delightful traits of the medieval public is that, being richly human, this public was quite illogically inconsistent in its moods. The one point about the great art of the Greeks which is impressed upon us most emphatically is that these supermen — and the world may nevermore be privileged to look upon their like again — could think only, and feel only, in one way at any predetermined moment. The Parthenon is absolutely holy: and no man may laugh irreverently when the moon is looking down upon it, under pain of being stricken dead by the drastic anger of the gods. But every Bible that was written in stone by the medieval builders exhibits many passages whereby the running observer is invited to laugh aloud at some emphatic abnegation of the sacred mood in which the edifice, considered as a whole, has been conceived. To the mind of the present commentator, no other habitual detail of medieval art is so impressive as the simple and almost childish sense of humor that is ascribed continually by all the artists of the middle ages to the God that they revere abjectly.

Guibour, which is a typical example of the religious drama of the fourteenth century, appears, at many points, naïve and funny to a modern audience. But

the thing to be remembered by the commentative auditor is that this childishness of humor was not accidental but intended. The writers of the middle ages, who plied their pens for the benefit of those who could not read, were not endeavoring to set the gods of their imagination lofty above Olympus, but were trying rather to bring these gods within familiar converse with those citizens who wandered daily through the market-place.

The Virgin Mary, in *Guibour*, gives quick expression to a clearly appreciable sense of humor; and so do her attendant angels. This expression did not seem incongruous to the medieval mind. The reverent, unlettered people of the middle ages were wisely taught to laugh before they died, because death was fleeting but laughter was immortal. To the modern observer, trained by recent accidents to a more consistent singularity of atmosphere, this fine example of the medieval drama is perhaps most interesting by reason of its multiplicity of moods. It salutes us, with eternal laughter on its lips, as a thing that is not at all afraid to die.

XXIX

THE GRANDEUR OF ENGLISH PROSE

The Book of Job

Robert Louis Stevenson, in a letter written from Vailima, in December, 1893, to Henry James, stated that his two aims in fiction might be described as,— "First, war to the adjective; Second, death to the optic nerve." As a stylist, he regretted the growing tendency of the age to receive impressions through the eye alone. A public overfed on newspapers and magazines soon learns to skim them rapidly in search of subject-matter; and this faculty for gathering the content of a printed page with a single stroke of the eye is applied subsequently to the reading of books. Nothing could be more stultifying to an appreciation of either verse or prose than this pernicious practice; for verse and prose are auditory arts, not visual, and must be listened to, and even murmured with the lips, in order that their patterns may be appreciated. To the optic nerve alone, no remarkable appeal is made by such a sentence as De Quincey's, "Moonlight and the first timid tremblings of the dawn were by the time blending"; but if this phrase be read aloud, with loving intonation, a notable appeal will certainly be made to ears that have not forgotten how to hear.

Perhaps the most important function of Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theatre is to remind a rarely listening public of the historic grandeur of our English prose. The plays that he presents make patterns for the ear, and might be appreciated by the blind. This fact is now exceedingly unusual; because the entire tendency of the theatre, throughout the last half century, has been in the contrary direction. The contemporary drama has made a sort of fetich of the fact that it appeals primarily to the optic, instead of to the auditory, nerve. It was developed by Ibsen, and his many staunch successors, in a period of realism; and in the interests of realism our recent dramatists have exerted the most punctilious literary tact in the effort to prevent themselves from writing any lines that might sound at all "literary" when spoken by the actors on the stage. Our contemporary drama, for the most part, is not written in verse nor even in prose; it is written, instead, in conversation: and the most successful playwrights of the present period are those who, like Sir James Barrie in England and Mr. George M. Cohan in America, have mastered the difficult and tricky craft of writing lines that seem to catch and utter the casual drift of unpremeditated colloquy.

Even romantic and poetic dramatists, like Maurice Maeterlinck, have adopted the current habit of addressing themselves primarily to the eye instead of to the ear, and have grown to rely more largely upon the visible appeal of scenery and lighting than upon the audible appeal that might be made by the whispery and slippered footfall of soft syllables or the fanfare

of a trumpet-blast of rhetoric. Truly, our plays in general have become again like little children,— in the proverbial sense that, when good, they should be seen and not be heard.

But Mr. Walker has at last discovered a romantic and poetic dramatist who still dares to write in prose, — who still prefers to appeal to the listening ear, instead of twanging at the optic nerve, as the capeadors of Spain flaunt flaming cloaks to capture the attention of the charging bull. Since the passing of his fellow-countryman, John Millington Synge — who was endowed with the eloquence of angels — Lord Dunsany is the only dramatist who has appeared in the English-speaking theatre to remind the public of the grandeur of our ancient English prose. Even Barrie, who began life as a man of letters, has preferred to write his dialogue in conversation; and even Bernard Shaw, for all his literary wit, has preferred to pretend that he was faithfully reporting the unpatterned speech of a generation that had never read aloud the exordium of Milton's *Areopagitica*.

The history of English prose, like the history of English blank verse, may be traced back to a great beginning along a single and undeviating line. Blank verse began in English in 1588, with the drums and tramplings of *Tamburlaine the Great*. The previous essays of Surrey and Sackville in this medium were really not important: it was Marlowe alone who molded for us our enduring mighty line. The new footfalls introduced successively by Shakespeare, Milton, Fletcher, Shirley, Cowper, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and

Stephen Phillips, are merely variations from a standard norm. Wherever English verse is chanted and listened to among the far-flung millions that engirdle the revolving world, the accents of that aureoled and flame-haired youth, who was slain by a serving-man in 1593, at the early age of twenty-nine, are still predominant and overwhelming.

English prose, analogously, dates backward along a direct, undeviating line to the King James translation of the Bible,— which remains, for all time, the greatest monument of prose in any modern language. The nameless men who, actuated by no foresight of posthumous celebrity, built up, verse by verse and chapter after chapter, that amazing monument of literary art, plucked unconsciously the loftiest of laurel-wreaths and set it as a crown upon the brow of anonymity. Our earliest deliberate organists of English prose,— John Milton and Sir Thomas Browne,— played merely the same tune that had been already orchestrated by these nameless predecessors; and it is not at all excessive to say that no man, since the outset of the seventeenth century, has ever learned to write great prose in English unless his ear had been trained from early childhood to appreciate the orchestral voluntaries of Sir Thomas Browne. De Quincey and Stevenson were brought up, according to their own confessions, on the *Religio Medici:* Ruskin and Rudyard Kipling, according to their own statements, were brought up on the English Bible: and no man, apparently, has ever yet attained a mastery of English prose whose ear, in early childhood, was not habitually trained to appreciate the

slow dark march of measured and majestic syllables that was applauded in the high and far-off times of that curious and futile English king who patronized the arts and wrote a treatise on tobacco.

These remarks have been occasioned by Stuart Walker's production of *The Book of Job*, in the eloquent English version of the King James translators. This piece is probably the oldest dramaturgic composition still current in the theatre of the world; and its very antiquity is clearly worthy of reverence. It is constructed very simply and with unquestionable grandeur. From the modern point of view, it must be admitted, however, that the action is excessively subjective. Nothing seems to happen externally upon the stage, before the very eyes of the spectators; but everything happens, instead, within the souls of Job and his assembled collocutors. To the modern mind, this internal and analytic method of setting forth a great dramatic theme is less impressive than the synthetic external method which was employed by the reigning dramatists of ancient Greece. *The Book of Job*, despite its philosophical augustness, can never touch the modern heart so poignantly as *The Trojan Women* of Euripides.

But *The Book of Job* — in that historic English version which was sent to press, three centuries ago, by an anonymous committee of immortal men of letters that had been assembled by an arbitrary fiat of King James — was written with a grandeur of great prose that must remain forever unforgettable so long as men have ears for hearkening.

XXX

"THE LAUGHTER OF THE GODS"

There is no longer any doubt that Lord Dunsany is a great dramatist, though his first play in point of time, *The Glittering Gate*, was written so recently as 1909. Like the dawn at Mandalay, his reputation has "come up like thunder"; and, in a single decade, he has given proof that his dramatic works are destined to be lauded by generations yet unborn. No other recent dramatist, with the single exception of his fellow-countryman, John Millington Synge, has been accepted so quickly by the critics as one of the immortals.

Lord Dunsany is the most original playwright who thus far has appeared since the nineteenth century was laid away in lavender. His work seems strange and new; because, instead of striving, like most of his contemporaries, to be always "up to date," he prefers to contemplate the momentary deeds of time through the telescope of eternity. In an age of realism, he has dared to blow a brazen trumpet to announce a resurrection of romance. In a scientific age, he has dared to regard the universe with a mind that is essentially religious. He has reverted to the immemorial method of inventing facts to illustrate a central truth, instead of employing the customary modern method of imitating actuality in a faint and far-off effort to suggest the underlying essence of reality. He has imagined and

realized a mythic world "some while before the fall of Babylon" which is more meaningful in utter truth than the little world that is revealed to the "up to date" observer of a Harlem flat or of a hired room in Houston Street. He has introduced into the practice of our modern theatre that enormous stage direction which Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in 1883, in a personal letter to William Ernest Henley,—"A stately music: enter God!"

But, now that Lord Dunsany has reached the age of forty, it is necessary also to remark that the expression of his genius has thus far been confined within technical limits that are comparatively narrow. A certain sameness is observable in all his plays,— a sameness in subject-matter, in structural method, in mental mood, and in literary style. This consistency may be considered by his critics as a merit or a fault, according to their point of view. It is clearly possible to laud an artist for the fact that every page that he has ever printed was obviously written by himself and could not have been composed, conceivably, by any other author; yet, on the other hand, there is perhaps a larger merit in the fact that it would be difficult to identify, by internal evidence alone, the author of Falstaff's scenes in *King Henry IV* (*Parts I and II*) with the author of *The Tragedy of Hamlet*.

Thus far, Lord Dunsany, as a dramatist, has confined himself to the composition of one-act plays. His only more extended effort, *Alexander*, has not as yet been published or produced. He has, we hope, a long career before him; but, on the evidence available on the

occasion of his fortieth birthday, it is not at all unfair to regard him as exclusively an artist in the one-act play, just as Edgar Allan Poe is fixed in history as exclusively an artist in the short-story. The strong point, with both of these technicians, is the intensity with which they are able to focus the imagination on a single definite and bounded project of the panorama of experience. Each of them is willing to sacrifice in range what he is able to gain in terrible intensity. Poe was not a novelist; and Lord Dunsany has still to prove that he can build successfully a three-act or a four-act play. Both men can seize a big idea and see it steadily; but this is a very different endeavor from seizing a great handful of experience and trying hard to see it as a whole.

In considering this technical detail, enthusiastic students of the plays of Lord Dunsany should be warned against the error of being led astray by the unimportant fact that, in the published text of *The Gods of the Mountain*, the three successive episodes are headed by the captions, "The First Act," "The Second Act," and "The Third Act," nor by the corresponding fact that *The Laughter of the Gods* is announced, upon the program, as "a play in three acts." In the case of these two compositions, and also in the case of *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior*, the momentary pauses in the action must be considered technically as the same sort of pauses, for the sake of emphasis, that were customarily marked with asterisks by Guy de Maupassant during the course of many of his most notable short-stories.

The one-act play is distinguished technically from the full-length play, not by the time required for its presentation, nor by the number of its pauses, marked naturally by the dropping of the curtain, but by its purpose and its mood. The purpose of the one-act play is to produce a single dramatic effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis; and its mood is derived reasonably from a central insistence upon that factor which was finely phrased by Poe as "totality of impression." Considered technically, *The Laughter of the Gods* — like *The Gods of the Mountain*, which preceded it by seven years — is not "a play in three acts," but a one-act play in three successive episodes.

Of the one-act play Lord Dunsany is an absolute master, just as Poe and Guy de Maupassant are utter masters of the short-story. The technical resemblance between the Irish dramatist and the American inventor of the modern concept of the short-story as essentially an exercise in sheer constructive skill has not yet been sufficiently commented on; but it may be easily established if the studious reader will compare the text of *The Queen's Enemies* with the text of *The Cask of Amontillado*.

But it is only in his structural technique that Lord Dunsany at all resembles Poe. In his evermore recurrent theme — the inevitable overcoming of the drastic sin of pride, or *hubris*, by the primal power of *ananke*, or necessity — he is allied more closely with the ancient Greeks; and, in his literary mood, the Irish dramatist more nearly resembles the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck

than he resembles Edgar Allan Poe. These matters may be easily defined by commentative critics; but the only bother is that Lord Dunsany has apparently been willing, through several years of wonder and waiting, to accept this easy labeling, instead of breaking out and startling his admirers by doing something unexpected. His latest works have not been disappointing: on the other hand, he has always satisfied a foreordained prediction by doing precisely what had been expected of him: but it might have seemed a little more adventurous if the author had managed somehow to launch something so different from all his antecedent compositions that it could not possibly have been foreseen.

The Laughter of the Gods is not so august a composition as *The Gods of the Mountain* nor so thrilling a fabric as *A Night at an Inn;* but it emphasizes the same theme that was announced in these antecedent compositions. When a theme is really great, there can be no critical objection to a repetition of it — witness, for example, the evermore recurrent projects of the Florentine painters who immortalized the great age of the Renaissance — but it is always a little disappointing to catch a great man, at the age of forty, in the act of writing what appears to be an imitation of his past endeavors. *The Laughter of the Gods,* a big play in itself, would have seemed more overwhelming if it had not been anteceded by other and greater renderings of the same project by the same artist.

But comparisons, as Dogberry remarked, are "odorous"; and, for the benefit of those who have not

yet been privileged to witness this latest exhibition of the art of a playwright of indubitable genius, it is desirable to report the plot of *The Laughter of the Gods.*

In the high and far off times when Babylon was something other than the echo of a name, there dwelt a king, called Karnos, in the metropolitan city of Babul-el-Charnak, a teeming city lauded by men of many nations as a wonder of the world. But this king grew weary of cities, and moved himself, with all his court, to a lonely palace in the jungle-seat of Thek, where wild beasts might be hunted in the heat of the day, and where, at the creeping on of twilight, a million orchids paled to purple beneath a silvery sky. In his jungle-seat of Thek, the king was well contented, for the region cooled his thoughts, like the laying of soft hands upon a tired brow; but his courtiers grew restive, and desired to return to the teeming city of Babul-el-Charnak.

The ladies of the court were discontented because the single little street of Thek, which soon ended in the jungle, was devoid of shops in which to spend their money and their time; and they besought their husbands to persuade King Karnos to take them back to the metropolis, whither merchants were wont to bring their wares from all the corners of the world. But the king persisted in his weariness of cities, and announced that he would stay forever where the orchids paled to purple in the quiet twilight.

Therefore his councilors, being stimulated to a deed of daring by the stinging of their wives, conspired together and hatched a plot to scare the king away from his jungle-seat of Thek. They seized upon a Prophet

of the Ancient Gods and commanded him to tell King Karnos that Thek was foredoomed to be destroyed three days from then, at sunset, with every living thing that still walked within its precincts. This prophecy, they argued, might be uttered with good conscience, since no reasonable man, in those advanced and scientific times, believed any longer in the Ancient Gods. But the Prophet still believed, and protested against this contemplated deed of blasphemy. His attitude was adamantine, until one of the appealing councilors revealed a knowledge of the fact that the Prophet had secretly taken unto himself a third wife, in defiance of the ancient law which limited to two the number of wives with whom Prophets were permitted to cohabit. Thereupon, the Prophet was constrained to obey the councilors, and to deliver to King Karnos the lying message of the Gods.

King Karnos listened sedately to this prophecy, and knew it for a lie, because it was not reasonable, and because, in those advanced and scientific times, none but priests and weakling women believed any longer in the Ancient Gods. Therefore the king decreed that, on the third day, at sunset, when the falling of the filtered sands of time should have proved the Prophet to be, in very fact, a liar, his head should be severed from his trunk by the royal executioner.

The Prophet was a large man, nurtured in religion; and what he feared, throughout the ticking of the hours still allotted to him before the execution of his doom, was not the awfulness of death itself, which is a customary and familiar thing, as when a wind arises and

sweeps across a table crowded with innumerable lighted candles, but the greater awfulness of something unfamiliar,— some special visitation of the anger of the Ancient Gods against the first and only Prophet who had ever made them seem to lie, throughout immemorable centuries.

Time moved serenely till the coming on of sunset, on the third day after the announcement of the manufactured prophecy. The contented king looked out upon the jungle, and saw the sea of orchids pale to purple beneath the quiet touch of the twilight. The tortured Prophet waited for his death, until the sun dropped down behind the tangled trees, and King Karnos turned magnificently toward the royal executioner, and ordered, "Take away that man!" But then a rumble arose, quietly at first, like the sighing of the sea, and then more noisy, like the congregated roar and rattle of all the thunders of the world. This rumble was the rumor of the grim, sardonic Laughter of the Gods. The jungle-seat of Thek was overwhelmed and swallowed up; and every living thing that walked within its precincts was drenched and drowned beneath the heavy seas of absolute oblivion. The Ancient Gods — who cannot lie — had chosen to fulfil the prophecy which had been wished upon them, in a mood of fear and trembling, by one of their august apostles.

XXXI

LORD DUNSANY

Personal Impressions

On a gusty night in October, 1919, an Irish peer — the eighteenth baron of his line — stood in the rain in front of a little theatre at 466 Grand Street, in the heart of the Russian Jewish quarter of the great East Side. He was easily distinguishable, because of his extraordinary height and the hulking army overcoat which housed him from the drizzle. Two or three hundred strangers — for the most part, Jewish people of the neighborhood — grasped him by the hand, patted him on the back, and asked him to scrawl his name on the fly-leaves of many books which they produced from pockets and presented proudly. The tall man was treated both as the host and as the guest of an unusual occasion. Suddenly there came a flash of lightning and a crash of thunder. "That must be Klesh," said Lord Dunsany; "he has come a long way from India."

The Irish peer himself had come a long way from Dunsany Castle and Messines Ridge, for the specific purpose of seeing a couple of plays which he had never seen before — *The Queen's Enemies* and *A Night at an Inn* — and finding out why so many commentators had made so large a noise about them. I could not be present at the Neighborhood Playhouse on this par-

ticular occasion; but I asked the author afterward to tell me how it felt to see a full-fledged performance — with an audience and all — of a couple of plays which he had sent overseas in manuscript. All the other playwrights I have ever known have worried and worked over their manuscripts, day after day, throughout the initial weeks of rehearsals and the secondary weeks of "tryouts," and have been heartily sick of hearing their own lines repeated, long before the date of a metropolitan first-night.

Dunsany answered that this unusual experience of his had proved once more that you can't tell much about a play until you see it on the stage. *A Night at an Inn* exceeded his own expectations, and he was surprised to note the thrill which it communicated to the audience. "It's a very simple thing," he said,— "merely a story of some sailors who have stolen something and know that they are followed. Possibly it is effective because nearly everybody, at some time or other, has done something he was sorry for, has been afraid of retribution, and has felt the hot breath of a pursuing vengeance on the back of his neck." With *The Queen's Enemies*, on the other hand, the author was a little disappointed. "When I wrote these two pieces," he told me, "I thought that *The Queen* was a better play than *The Inn!* Now I know that *A Night at an Inn* is the more dramatic of the two."

"But don't mistake me," he continued, "*The Inn* is a more effective play than *The Queen;* but it isn't so fine an undertaking. Suppose that I should give a block of wood to a sculptor and ask him to carve it,

and suppose that he should cut it very well; that is *A Night at an Inn.* Suppose, next, that I should give a tusk of ivory to the same sculptor and he should carve it not so well: that is *The Queen's Enemies.* It isn't so dramatic a play as *The Inn;* but it is intrinsically finer."

"Why do you think that?" I inquired.

"Because of the idea," the author answered. "The idea of *A Night at an Inn* is rather ordinary: that, I suppose, is the reason why it hits the audience so hard: and, as several critics, like yourself, have pointed out, it is an idea of the same sort that I had used before in *The Gods of the Mountain.* But I like the idea of *The Queen's Enemies.* I heard about an ancient queen of Egypt who invited all her enemies to a feast of reconciliation and suddenly drowned them. This meant nothing until I could imagine the motive for this extraordinary deed. Several months later, the motive occurred to me. The dear little queen had done this for the very simple reason that she didn't like to have any enemies: she wanted to be loved, not to be hated. The rest was easy; for the play was made when the motive was discovered."

"Do you always begin with a motive?" I asked.

"Not always," said Dunsany; "I begin with anything, or with next to nothing. Then, suddenly, I get started, and go through in a hurry. The main point is not to interrupt a mood. Writing is an easy thing when one is going strong and going fast; it becomes a hard thing only when the onward rush is impeded. Most of my short plays have been written in a sitting or

two. The other day "— he said in December, 1919,— "I got an idea for a short play in St. Louis. I began the composition on the train and finished it before we arrived in Chicago. It's a little piece about a monk who grew a halo. I hope that you will like it."

"How about *The Gods of the Mountain?*" I asked.

"I wrote that in three sessions," Lord Dunsany answered,—"two afternoons between tea and dinner and another hour on the third afternoon. *A Night at an Inn* was written between tea and dinner in a single sitting. That was very easy." . . .

"No trouble about the dialogue?" I suggested.

"Dialogue isn't difficult if you have been around with men a lot, and listened to them. Somebody says something; the next man doesn't quite agree, and unobtrusively suggests a reservation; the third man says, 'No, not at all, the truth is. . . .' And that is dialogue."

"But the writing?"

"Well, of course, there is such a thing as rhythm," Lord Dunsany answered.

"You agree with me, though, that the dramatic value of a play stands quite apart from any literary merit it may or may not show in the writing of its dialogue?"

"I do, indeed. Don't damn me as a 'literary' playwright. You have read ten of my plays; but I have already written more than twenty. The best of them are still unpublished. I am holding them back, in the hope that people may be forced to see them before they have a chance of reading them."

"That reminds me of Pinero," I replied. "Ten years ago, Sir Arthur started a friendly habit of sending me prompt-copies of each of his new plays; but he made me promise never to read these printed texts till after I had seen the plays in the theatre,— particularly if I should be called upon to write critical reviews of them."

"I can understand that," said Lord Dunsany. "I misjudged *The Queen* and *The Inn* until I saw them acted."

"If you write a play so quickly," I suggested, "I infer that the whole thing must be planned out in your mind before you start to write it. Among magazine men, I am known as a quick writer. I publish more than half a hundred articles a year; and most of them are turned out in a single night. But, before I sit down to write the first sentence, I have been thinking for three or four days, in the subway, between the acts, or when other people were talking to me. In the real sense, the task has more nearly consumed a week than a day. An impromptu speech takes only three or four minutes; but sometimes, with me,— if the occasion is important,— it spoils a day or two beforehand. I can't imagine anybody writing *The Gods of the Mountain* in a few hours, confined within three days, unless a long period of preparation — much of it subconscious, to be sure — had gone before."

"Sometimes," Lord Dunsany said, "I have thought the matter out, and know exactly what I am going to do; that was the case with *The Gods;* but at other times, I just get started and follow a mood as a hunter

follows the hounds. I will give you an example,—*King Argimenes.* I saw a king in rags, digging up a bone, gnawing at it hungrily, and saying, 'This is a good bone.' I started the play with no idea whatever of its subsequent development. I merely wrote along, to find out what would happen."

"I have always thought so," I replied ungraciously. "You know, of course, that this is one of the few plays of yours that I don't especially admire. It seems to me inconsequential, and not built up to a climax."

"That must be because I didn't know the end when I started the beginning. . . . Of course, it is better to have things planned," the author added, "and not to trust entirely to the impulsion of a mood."

In recording this conversation, I have anteceded the chronological order of these haphazard personal impressions. As a matter of fact, the first time that I met Lord Dunsany was at a public dinner in his honor, at which I endeavored to do my duty as one of the speakers. It was a good occasion, of the customary sort. When we were coming away, I asked him if he were growing tired of publicity. "Publicity?" he countered quickly. "You don't call this public! You ought to have seen our trenches under Messines Ridge. That's the most public place I have ever been in. We were in a valley. The Germans were on a hill. They could see down to our boot-tops." He looked at me and asked, "How tall are you?" "Six feet one, or thereabouts." "I am six feet four. Our trenches were only six feet deep. I shall never fear 'publicity' again."

On a subsequent occasion, I asked Lord Dunsany to tell me something of his life in the army. "I was brought up to be a soldier," he replied. "I wasn't sent to Oxford or to Cambridge, but to Sandhurst. I went through the South African affair and the whole of the recent war. I have this to say about military preparation: it doesn't educate a man, it merely trains him. A trained man can do one single thing with almost mechanical perfection; but an educated man can do almost anything that he is called upon to do. I was merely trained. It is better to be educated. The college is a better place for this than the army."

At another time, I touched upon the point that Lord Dunsany had not yet enjoyed the dubious experience — so common to the rest of us — of peddling his plays from manager to manager. I told him that most of the American playwrights to whom I had presented him were required, by the nature of the game, to devote much more of their time to the practical task of "placing" their plays than to the more attractive task of writing them. Lord Dunsany answered: "That may be the reason why ten or a dozen of my best plays have not yet been acted. I have never had the time to peddle them. Ninety-seven per cent.— or thereabouts — of my actual life has been spent out of doors in the pursuit of various athletic activities,— such as following the hounds, playing cricket, hunting big game, or serving as a professional soldier. The remaining three per cent. has been spent in the writing of my tales and plays,— the records of my dreams. What time is left for peddling my literary wares? . . . I have recently

written two or three plays, of full length, which treat of contemporary life in London. How does one sell these things in London or New York?"

This question surprised me, until I made the astonishing discovery that I had actually earned more money from a single "failure" in our commercial theatre than Lord Dunsany has earned from all of the "successes" in our little theatres that have made him famous. When *The Gods of the Mountain* was put into rehearsal at the Haymarket Theatre in London, he was offered ten pounds for the world-rights in perpetuity. This contract struck him as inequitable; and he requested that the world-rights should be limited to five years. This period has long ago elapsed; but the author received less than fifty dollars for the first five years of the actual existence of what is probably the greatest short play in the world. It is gratifying to record that he has since developed, by experience, a business-sense that is more practical.

"Writing plays," he told me, "is the one thing I most dearly love; but I cannot talk of it at home, in County Meath. My aunt would be scandalized if she should hear that I have written plays; my neighbors would dismiss me as insane; everybody else would think me a fool; I had to come to your country to find a sympathetic audience."

I told him that Sir Arthur Pinero, after the comparative failure of *Mid-Channel* in London and the comparative success of the same piece in New York, had said to me jocosely: "If it were not for America, we couldn't keep alive." Lord Dunsany said, "Your

public is surprisingly alert." Having been a lecturer myself, I answered adversely: "When people seem to like our speeches, and swarm around us to request us to sign books, we naturally think that they have brains." To this he answered, "That is not the point. In your country, I have met many people who are not ashamed to talk of art. In England, nowadays, the subject is laughed away from the carpet.

"When *The Gods of the Mountain* was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre, one rather snobbish critic said that the play was bad, for the mere reason that it had been written by a nobleman. He ordered me back to my ancestral castle, just as Keats was ordered back, a century ago, to his apothecary pots. Why should Keats have been despised, in a period of aristocracy? And why should I be despised, in a period of democracy? It isn't my fault that I try to write beautiful tales and effective plays.

"It is only in your country that my attempts have been appreciated. I have no fame in England. I have scarcely any ranking among the authors of my own country; you know many more of them than I do; but I am grateful to your nation for the incentive to carry on. Poets thrive upon appreciation; and I need the sort of encouragement that has been granted to me by your hospitable people."

"How about that division of your life," I asked, "three per cent. of which, according to your smiling statement, has been devoted to your writing, and the overwhelming remainder to athletics?" "I have found this out," said Lord Dunsany, "that you must

not talk of art to the majority of men who follow active lives in the open air,— like cricketers, or huntsmen, or soldiers. On the other hand, I have found out that, among artists, you may extol without embarrassment the virtues of the athletes of the world. Why is it that the men of action are always afraid of the men of dreams, whereas the men of dreams are never afraid of the men of action? It must be because the dream is always stronger than the act. Jeanne d'Arc is evermore more potent to win a battle than a regiment of British soldiers. That is because this peasant girl of long ago has been made real by the imagination of millions of people. Nothing can, at any time, be realized but what has been imagined.

"I like the active life in the open; and, after four or five years in the war, I actually feel uncomfortable in a room with the windows closed; but the active life is very lonely. I can talk to a man of letters like yourself about cricketing or lion-hunting or soldiering, and you will be interested, because artists are interested in everything. But I cannot talk about my dreams to cricketers or soldiers or lion-hunters; they would think that something had gone wrong with me. I was very lonely in the trenches; and it has been a great pleasure for me to meet so many writers in America and to find that most of them are sportsmen as well."

"What do you think of the effect of the war upon the drama?" I inquired.

"Four years of hell and heroism have trampled down the immediate actual, and reminded us of the insistence of the perennial real. We have learned that idealism

is the only absolute reality. The stricken world must reawaken; and the theatre should be resurrected with it. The time has passed away for such faithful but depressing records of the drabbest aspects of our current life as the *Night Lodging* of Maxim Gorki, an act of which I saw the other day. A moment has arrived for reminding the theatre-going public that such a thing as splendor is still to be discerned in the records of experience. Let us set before the public splendid images of beauty; for beauty is truth, despite the critic who tried to send Keats back to his apothecary pots."

"Keats died without knowing whether he would be famous or not," said I. "You are famous at forty. You have been luckier than Keats."

"Yes, I have been lucky," he replied, "thanks mainly to your country; but that is as it should be. I am not speaking personally; but, after all, I am a poet, and poets ought to be appreciated in their lifetime. In England, a poet has to die to be appreciated. Look at Rupert Brooke; they wouldn't read him while he lived. In England, I am merely a lord."

"Aren't you at all bored by being lionized in this country?"

"Not at all: I like it," he replied.

Lord Dunsany is a man who — whether you agree with him or not on any given point — is undeniably alive. He is excessively tall, loose-jointed, raw-boned, rather awkward, and encumbered with a large head and enormous hands and feet. He admits jocosely that, at home, he is generally regarded as the worst-dressed man in County Meath. He shambles along

with a drooping posture, accentuated doubtless by his long and cramping experience in the trenches under Messines Ridge; but his mind is neither awkward nor drooping. He talks fluently and well; and his nature is so frank and simple that he is a very easy man to get acquainted with.

XXXII

EDMOND ROSTAND

April 1, 1868 — December 2, 1918

One advantage comes to us when we have passed that milestone of experience which marks the *mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.* While remaining unaware of any obvious decrease in physical or mental vigor, we grow ready to enjoy some of the delights which by tradition are reserved for age. In particular, we begin by gradual degrees to become conscious of that keenest pleasure of which the maturing mind is capable,— the joy of recalling the affluent impressions of adventures long ago and far away. We are eager — after thirty-five — to remember what we used to be; and this new eagerness provides us with a new excitement. We discover with surprise that Thomas Campbell spoke the truth when he told us that " 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view." It seems, at first, a strange and wondrous gift to be able to look backward over a purple vista of twenty or thirty years. Old age begins, beforehand, to assume a sort of aureole; for how wonderful — a man is moved to think — this life of ours will look when we are able to recall a past experience across a mist of half a century! *Quand vous serez bien vieille* occurs as the most pathetic phrase in all the

sonnets that were even written; but the counter-phrase, *quand vous étiez bien jeune,* is possibly more poignant still to the imagination. . . .

When I picked up a paper and read the brief and tragic news that Edmond Rostand had joined "the famous nations of the dead," I thought, first, not about the man himself but about the much that he had meant to me, a score of years ago, when I was but a boy. In fairly recent years, I have published two or three critical and reasonable essays about the work of this intoxicating poet; but these essays were written in that reticent and careful manner which imposes on the commentator a punctilious obligation to refer to himself as "the present writer." Such sage pronouncements usually err by tilting all too timidly away from sheer enthusiasm. Several years ago, "the present commentator"— à propos of *Chantecler* — pronounced this sentence on Edmond Rostand: "He is a consummate writer, surely; but he has the air of a spoiled child sporting in an illimitable playroom where all the toys are words." That's the sort of thing that critics write when they are under thirty. It is only after we are old enough to remember the lost days of our youth that we who ply the pen begin to speak out from the heart — to let ourselves go, as the phrase is — and to employ in print the genuinely modest pronoun *I.*

By an accident of dates, I am able to recall the entire career of the laureled poet who lies dead in France at the early age of fifty. I never saw him in the flesh; but he is one of the very few contemporary writers from whom I have received that unforgettable, exalted

tingling of the spirit which, otherwise, has been inspired in me only by Italian paintings, or Greek statues, or French cathedrals, or one or two great living people it has been my privilege to know, like Madame Yvette Guilbert. Many critics have already weighed and estimated the "importance" of Edmond Rostand; but now I cannot think of him at all except as one of those who, in my youth, first taught me to love everlastingly the loveliness of words.

I was brought up — by a happy accident — to understand both languages, and in my childhood I read as many masterpieces of French literature as I read of English; but I had never heard of Edmond Rostand until the New Year of 1898, when I was sixteen years of age. I still remember clearly the noise of the first news — heard all around the rolling globe — that *Cyrano de Bergerac* (produced in Paris on the night of December 28, 1897) was the most entrancing play that had ever yet been shown at any time on any stage. This news seemed, at the moment, to be unbelievable; and, for several months, we who waited in America were expecting a categorical denial of its authenticity. Meanwhile, however, many travelers from overseas returned with the assurance that the news was true. An unknown poet had positively written, at the early age of twenty-nine, the most captivating play in history. To me, among innumerable others, this suggestion was stimulative of a feverish excitement. I put in an order at Brentano's for the text and bothered the bookstore for days and days and weeks and weeks until the first copies came to us across the ocean. I

remember vaguely that there was a rather long delay, due doubtless to some accident of printing. At any rate, before the text arrived, all of us whose names were registered upon the waiting-list had been made familiar, by international reports, with the project and the plot; and I still can recollect my ecstatic joy at securing one of the first consignment of copies that was landed in this country.

In those days [it was the year of the Spanish-American War] there was a shabby little café in Sixth Avenue — on the east side, just south of Twenty-eighth Street — that was known as the Café de Bordeaux. It has long since been cleaned up and "improved" and "modernized" as the *rez-de-chausée* of the worthy establishment conducted, for the comfort of the present generation of New Yorkers, by the estimable Monsieur Mouquin. But, in the old days of which I speak, the Café de Bordeaux was a dingy place, frequented by impoverished Frenchmen who played backgammon on decaying boards or ancient gambling games with dirty decks of cards. Thither — at a moment now a score of years ago — I made my way; because, at that time, it was one of three places in New York where one might secure a veritable *amer picon* with *grenadine* and *eau de seltz*. My virgin copy of *Cyrano de Bergerac* was sticking out of my pocket; and some French waiter — on vacation — saw it. I was set upon at once and made to open up the book and forced to read aloud —

> Je jette avec grâce mon feutre,
> Je fais lentement l'abandon

Du grand manteau qui me calfeutre,
Et je tire mon espadon. . . .

In a moment or two, the games of backgammon ceased and the whispering of falling cards was quenched in silence. I was soon enthroned upon a table and reading — in my rhetorical schoolboyish manner — the sonorous series of triolets beginning —

Ce sont les cadets de Gascogne
De Carbon de Castel-Jaloux. . . .

At the end of the first stanza, that helter-skelter company of Frenchmen far from home broke spontaneously into cheers. I enjoyed my first and only triumph as an actor. That day within that place men played no more. . . .

Thereafter, night after night, I squandered the after-midnight gas, reading and rereading the magic text of this entrancing play; and it is pleasant now to think that innumerable other boys whom I have never met were rendered sleepless at the same time by the same apparent miracle. Why can't we feel these things so keenly when we are nearly forty as in the brave days when we were under twenty? But to answer that question would be to solve the evermore recurrent riddle: — why all the greatest actors are dead actors and all the things most worthy of the seeing were seen always somewhere long ago. . . . Perhaps my little boys will tell me when I am really old. . . .

I recall now that, in recent years, I have written one or two maturely reasoned articles to prove that *Cyrano*

de Bergerac was not a great play, after all. I have even asserted, on the lecture platform, that the project of the plot is fundamentally immoral. These intellectual considerations begin to seem important to dramatic critics who have passed the pinnacle of thirty; but they never bothered our appreciative minds when we were young enough to love things lovely without interruptive questionings or *arrières-pensées*. Neither do they bother us when we are old enough to remember with delight the enthusiasms of our youth. Even now, while strolling home o' nights through silent streets — before the milk-carts have begun to clatter — I often hear myself repeating to myself —

> Philosophe, physicien,
> Rimeur, bretteur, musicien,
> Et voyageur aérien. . . .

When the news of the incomparable success of the new piece at the Porte Saint-Martin had been thoroughly authenticated, Richard Mansfield — the foremost American actor of the time — closed his season, slipped quietly across the ocean, and sat night after night watching from the front the performance of Coquelin. Mansfield was the first actor that I saw in the part. Coquelin I did not see until the autumn of 1900, when he opened in New York at the Garden Theatre with Sarah Bernhardt as Roxane. I shall never forget that opening. On Sunday — the day of the dress-rehearsal — Coquelin was afflicted with an acute attack of intestinal indigestion. This ailment was so painful that he could not sleep at all for forty-

eight hours. Yet on Monday — the first night of his public appearance — he carried off the whole stupendous undertaking with no indication whatsoever that anything was wrong. I saw him again on Tuesday night, and twice on Wednesday, and so on throughout the week. Eight performances of the same play in six successive days! . . . Would to God that some ingratiating spirit might arise to make me love the theatre now as I must have loved it then!

Being thoroughly familiar with both Cyranos — the others, even Wyndham, do not count — I am able to testify that Mansfield's was not, by any means, an imitation of Coquelin's. It was, indeed, deliberately different; and, in many technical respects, it was more obviously meritorious. Mansfield's performance was more clever, more astonishing, more brilliant. For instance, he outranged the scope of Coquelin in the scene in which the hero detains the Comte de Guiche by narrating his pretended adventures during the course of a descent from the moon. Mansfield chanted this entire passage mystically, making use of those 'cello tones of a voice which, for musical efficiency, was utterly unrivaled in the world. But, despite the cleverness of Mansfield, I preferred the performance of Coquelin. I am sure, now, that Coquelin was greater, for the simple reason that I find it more difficult, after twenty years, to remember what Coquelin did at any questionable moment than to remember what Mansfield did. Mansfield *acted* the part admirably; but Coquelin walked on, and *was* Cyrano, and that was the only fact to be regarded. To this feeling, the supreme expres-

sion was accorded by the author in his dedication of the play: "*C'est à l'âme de Cyrano que je voulais dédier ce poème. Mais puisqu'elle a passé en vous, Coquelin, c'est à vous que je le dédie.*"

In these hurried days, when so many other matters are demanding to be read about that the death of a great poet appears only as a momentary bubble on the tide of time, space and time are lacking for a record of impressions garnered from a loving recollection of the earliest performances of the other masterpieces of Edmond Rostand. I call them masterpieces now — without critical exception or reasonable reservation — because, concerning this aristocrat of poets, it must at least be said that, throughout his whole life of half a century, he never wrote a bad line and never touched a subject that he did not manage to adorn.

Any poet who can haunt the ear for twenty years must, manifestly, be immortal. The newspapers tell me that Edmond Rostand died in Paris, of influenza and pneumonia, at one-thirty P. M. on December 2, 1918. I don't believe this news — not really — because, so often and so often, I have walked the streets of countless cities saying over to myself,—

C'est chose bien commune
De soupirer pour une
Blonde, châtaine, ou brune
Maîtresse,
Lorsque brune, châtaine,
Ou blonde, on l'a sans peine.
— Moi, j'aime la lointaine
Princesse!

That final phrase has always sounded to my ear like a backward flinging of full fingers over streaming strings. I have never heard anything more *instrumental* in all lyric literature. Edmond Rostand is dead, the papers tell me; but this poet cannot really die, so long as French remains a living language and little boys are taught to listen to it in a loving country overseas.

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