PUBLISHER'S ADVERTISEMENT

A GREAT NUMBER of books on Soviet Russia have come from the press during recent years—but mainly impressions of the Soviet régime by visitors to or residents in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the lack of really precise and definite information has been as noticeable as the plethora of impressions.

We accordingly requested prominent Soviet officials to prepare a series of books which would *describe* and *explain* the Soviet system and method in the various branches of economic, political, national, social, and artistic life. We have italicised the words *describe* and *explain*; for the intention is simply to tell us, for instance, *how* labour is organised, *how* the problem of nationalities is being dealt with, *how* a collective farm works, *how* commodities are distributed, *how* justice is administered, and so on.

V. G.

NOTE ON P. A. MARKOV

P. A. MARKOV was born in 1897. He graduated at Moscow University (history and philology).

In 1918 he joined the Theatre department of the People's Commissariat of Education. In 1919 he was active in literary and pedagogical work. A year later, he organised a number of theatrical studios. In 1921 he became one of the organisers of The Institute of Theatre Research, which subsequently became the theatre section of the State Academy of the Art Sciences.

In 1925 Markov joined the Moscow Art Theatre in the capacity of director of the literary department, and was instrumental in grouping around the theatre a number of young Soviet dramatists and in bringing out new writers, such as Leonov, Ivanov, Katayev, Olesha, and others. He is still working as the literary director of the Moscow Art Theatre.

In 1931 he joined the Nemirovich-Danchenko State Musical Theatre, as the director of its Art Department, and brought to that theatre several young composers and poets (Shostakovich, Shibalin, Mosolov, Inber, Bagritzky, etc.).

In 1933, he began work as stage-manager of the Musical Theatre. He has since then staged *Traviata* and the ballet *The Rivals*.

Markov has also been the dramatic critic of the *Pravda* (1924–30), and is now dramatic critic of *Izvestia* and the magazine *Novy Mir*.

Markov's writings include *Trends in the Theatre* (Moscow, 1929) and a number of works on the history of the theatre, as well as on the contemporary theatre; he also wrote a series of sketches on contemporary Soviet actors for the magazines *Krasnva Nov* and *Soviet Theatre*.

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THE SOVIET THEATRE

by

P. A. MARKOV

WITH 36 PLATES

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMATIC FORCES RELEASED BY THE REVOLUTION

THE THEATRE has undergone a profound transformation during the sixteen years that have passed since the Revolution. The radical changes that have been made in the economic and political map of the U.S.S.R. have been accompanied by as great changes in its theatrical map.

THE RAPID GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF THEATRES

Remote parts of our country, formerly ignorant of the very existence of the theatre, now have thriving theatrical groups of their own with some fifty thousand active men and women, workers and employees, enthusiastically devoting all their spare time to them. In out-of-the-way villages, where people formerly had the most fantastic ideas and fears about actors as such, the arrival of a troupe at a

collective farm or State farm is warmly welcomed, and every attention and kindness is shown them. In large towns, special seats are reserved in the theatres for the shock-brigade workers of the factories. Seats for particular performances are booked by public organisations months in advance. The theatres cannot accommodate all those desirous of attending.

Suffice it to say that in the R.S.F.S.R. alone there are about five hundred theatres where the actors are professionals. In 1910 there were only seven big theatres in Moscow. Now there are nearly forty. Here are a few statistics : The number of theatres has increased four times. The number of actors has increased three times. Theatres in forty different languages have been established by the national minorities in the Soviet Union. There are nine times as many theatre-schools as formerly (in Moscow alone there are twenty-eight of these schools). Instead of the nineteen workers' clubs of pre-revolutionary years, there are now four thousand six hundred and eighty-seven. The construction of a vast number of new theatres has been begun. According to the Five-Year Plan a hundred and fifteen new theatres with a seating capacity of a hundred

and eighty-two thousand are being erected in the Russian part of the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Leningrad and many of the big towns, there are Culture Clubs with theatres, concert-halls, cinemas, reading-rooms, etc.

THE IMPROVED QUALITY OF THE PERFORMANCES

Before the Revolution, the Korsch Theatre, one of the largest in Moscow, which did not trouble itself overmuch about the artistic side of the show, used to produce a new play every week in order to attract the philistine public. The "Friday nights" of the Korsch Theatre were always "first nights," and were an indispensable feature of the theatre season.

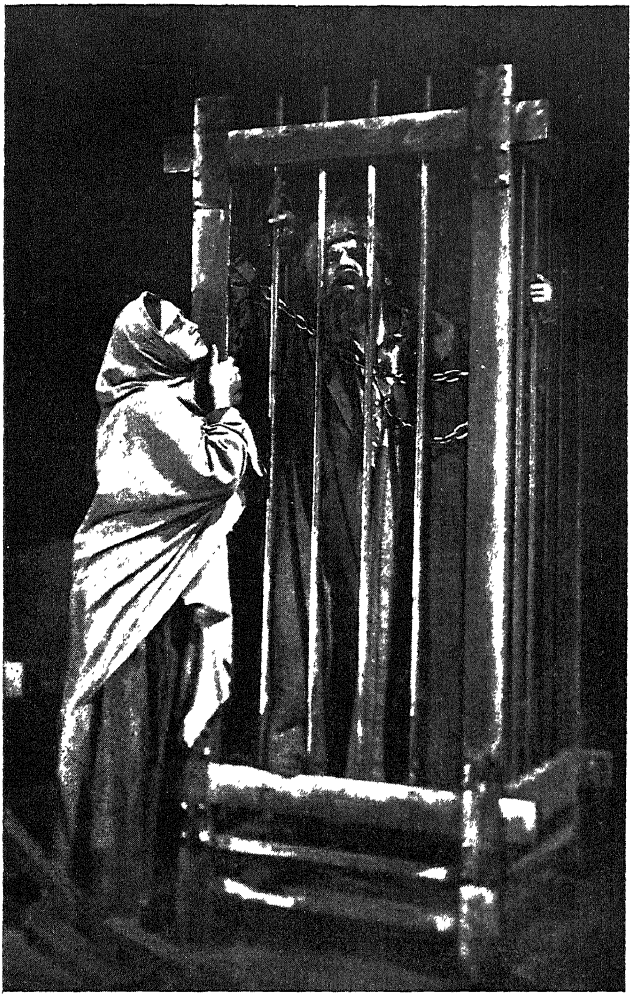
The Moscow Dramatic Little Theatre was always noted for the brilliance of its cast, but it too suffered from a lack of really gifted producers. Some twelve or fourteen new plays were produced every season, and it is evident that they could not have received sufficient study and care. This great number of insufficiently developed productions seemed quite natural at the time. Only a few theatres, like the Moscow Art Theatre, limited their output

and never went beyond three or four new plays a season.

The abundant crop of new productions was not by any means an indication of theatrical efficiency but rather of a frivolous and irresponsible attitude to art.

This was not a special characteristic of Moscow and St. Petersburg; in the provinces it was even worse. Plays were produced after no more than four or five rehearsals. In the smaller towns, one rehearsal was often regarded as sufficient. In towns like Tula and Orel, the number of new productions per season was from fifty to seventy. To-day it has dropped to ten. In those days a play could not be shown more than four or five times, while to-day it can run for fifty nights or more. Then the theatre depended entirely on a rather small circle of not very exacting patrons. Under such conditions it was no use dreaming of any artistic progress for the theatre.

The provincial theatres thrived and existed on imitations and almost photographic reproductions of the St. Petersburg and Moscow successes. Dilettantism, side by side with the worst forms of antiquated routine, reigned supreme on the stage.



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Pugatchev Rebellion* by K. Trenev, Act IV. Directed by Nemirovitch-Danchenko. Setting by Sokoloff.

THE NEW CHARACTER OF THE AUDIENCE

The extension of the theatrical network has affected the tempo and nature of its work. The provincial theatre has given up mechanical imitation of the capital's theatres and become an independent artistic force. The reason for this may be looked for in the fact that it draws its support from new social classes, in the vitalising necessity of its having to cater for large working-class audiences.

Formerly the theatre with a high artistic standard could only count on the support of a small and exclusive group of theatre-goers. To-day the theatre is creatively stimulated by the vast masses who are directly engaged in reconstructing their country and directly influence its art. The demands of these new and eager audiences have proved much more exacting and serious than was at first expected by the frightened intelligentsia during the first years of the Revolution. Working-class audiences came flocking to the theatre in their thousands. They did not look upon the theatre as an easily accessible and frivolous course of entertainment, but as a powerful artistic force for

the re-education and reconstruction of men and women.

The new audiences demanded of the theatre not merely relaxation and amusement. They wanted to understand things and to foresee. No matter what the play or how it was interpreted, the audience, regardless of personal tastes and sympathies, expected it to provide answers to the burning questions of the day, and at the same time to assist in the assimilation of the past culture. Least of all does the audience want a dispassionate theatre. And how, indeed, can the theatre remain dispassionate in a country where such a complete refashioning of social relations is going on, such a complete re-education and re-creation of people, such a thorough revaluation of all moral values.

The wall dividing the theatre from life is breaking down. Life direct and passionate, the civil war and socialist reconstruction forced their way on to the stage in the shape of new plays and new heroes, in the headlong rhythm of events and the inventiveness of the theatre-producers.

At times the theatre fails to keep pace with life. Then the audience feels that its hopes

have not been realised and goes home disappointed. This makes theatrical workers realise all the more the responsibility laid on them by the new type of spectators, who in no way resemble the bored and *blasé* "first-nighters" of former times. The audience has changed both in its social composition and in its reaction.

Foreign visitors to the Soviet theatre are often surprised by the direct perceptiveness and the eager responsiveness of the audience—qualities they never expected. The performance is frequently interrupted by bursts of applause and laughter, or followed with tense and expectant attention. The audience seems to live the life represented on the stage and to take part, as it were, in the action. Scientists, engineers, collective farmers, students, workers and school-children, all bring with them their own experiences, their thoughts and emotions, and expect the stage to help verify them.

The actor's function goes beyond mere entertainment: it becomes a link in the chain of construction with which the country is embraced. The old type of actor, vain and morbid, is dying out. His place has been taken by a new type of actor who realises his great responsibility to the masses. Theatres assume

"patronage" over particular factories and collective farms, which means that they undertake to give assistance in cultural work, they help the dramatic "circles," and actors pay periodical visits to the provinces and villages.

The theatre has become the home of great thoughts, profound problems, intense human emotions and passions. Plays and theatrical performances of all kinds are passionate, convincing witnesses to significant human lives and historic events. The theatre has ceased to be a soulless recreation, it has become an art that has to be approached in all seriousness and with the greatest sense of responsibility. It can only be creative in the hands of those who love it and who understand and love the audience.

THE THEATRE IN THE FACTORIES AND FARMS

The spectator is hungering for art. He wants both to know and see. The theatre has now established close contact with the audience. Councils and committees have been organised in connection with the theatres, and at these, the representatives of the factories and works can meet the best producers and theatre

MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Pugatchev Rebellion* by K. Trenev, Act V. Directed by Nemirovitch-Danchenko. Setting by Sokoloff.

artists. The factory representatives can take part in the preparation of the repertory and come into direct contact with representatives of the theatre and literature. Spectators' conferences are arranged by the theatres. At these conferences reports are read on the results of work done so far, and the tasks before the theatre. The problem of raising the theatre to a higher theoretical level is frequently discussed at these conferences.

A young dramatist whose play has just had a great success in Moscow, wrote that only when the play had been shown to the audience did he really get a sensation of art. Till then the scenes upon which the producer had lavished so much inventiveness, the splendid acting, and the best of his own text—had all seemed dead to him.

At times the stage comes into conflict with the audience. This may happen when a controversial question is introduced, or when the producer devotes himself to an experiment in form. On these occasions the audience splits up into two camps—opponents and defenders, into enthusiastic apologists and vehement accusers. The worst verdict for any play is the cold silence of the audience, when the spectators

are neither interested in the play nor stirred by its performance, and leave the theatre as indifferent as when they came. Indifferent art has no place in our theatre.

It is not a question of satisfying the demands of the spectator, but of stimulating mutual understanding. The theatre is growing more and more an indivisible part of the working masses. The names of Meyerhold and of the Moscow Art Theatre are known in remote villages and on the collective farms. The best concerts and operas can now be heard over the air. Requests come from all over the Union for this or that theatre company to be sent out to the provinces. During these tours, the actors have a splendid opportunity of becoming acquainted with local life. A great deal of educational work is carried on in connection with these tours. Lectures and reports give an account of the life and aims of the theatres. The theatres organise small groups which have their own special programmes designed to suit the needs of the workers' clubs. These groups frequently visit the factories and give performances in the workshops during the dinner-hour. They also act plays out in the fields, when the collective farmers are out on the sowing or

harvesting campaigns. Burning topics of the day are often treated in these performances, the material for which is collected locally. The theatre also carries on social and political work. It assists local non-professional theatres, gives advice as to the repertory and organises local art forces. Thus the public is kept in closest contact with the theatre. The audience gives the theatre the warmest of welcomes everywhere, and the greatest attention. The actor performing to an audience of workers feels akin to it—a comrade in socialist construction. The names of the great actors are familiar to the working masses.

THE "CULTURAL REVOLUTION" AND PAST TRADITIONS

The newspapers devote a great deal of space to the discussion of the drama. The slogan of the "Cultural Revolution" is being enthusiastically and triumphantly carried into execution.

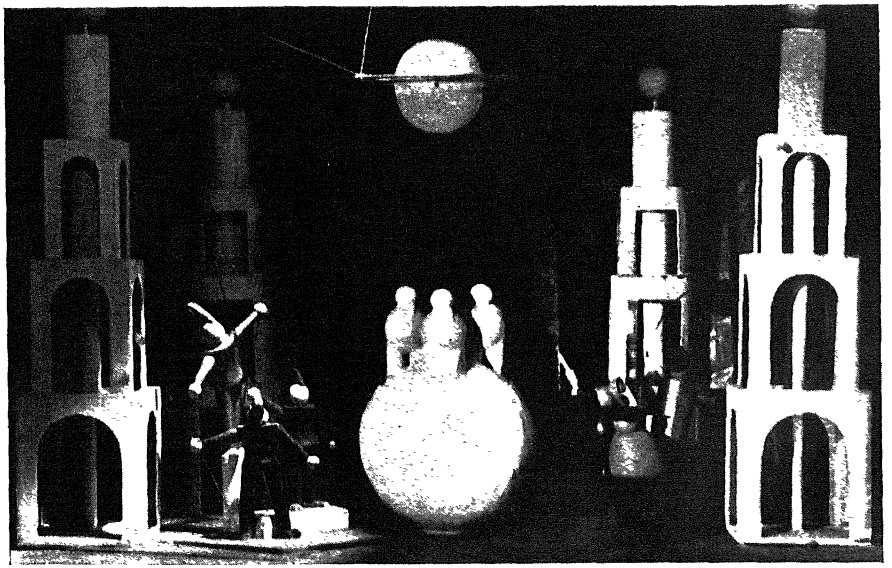
The expectations and demands of the new audience naturally determine the different kinds and types of theatre. A very clear indication of the rise of the new socialist culture

is the dying out of certain forms which thrived in the first years of the Revolution.

Those types of plays which were indissolubly linked with the bourgeois outlook died out by degrees, or underwent a radical transformation. Thus, for instance, the farce, when the group it catered for no longer existed, disappeared from the stage altogether. The operetta had to be thoroughly overhauled and transformed, not because the audience no longer wanted to laugh or had lost its sense of humour, but because it looked for new subjects for laughter and developed a less shallow attitude towards humour and satire.

But if some forms died out, new ones were born, and some of the old ones expanded. The political play came to the fore along with the historical " chronicle." The vaudeville and the musical comedy, the propaganda " poster-play," became popular throughout the country.

Of the old theatres, those that were strongest artistically survived and received a creative impetus for the new conditions. These include the Moscow Art Theatre, the Little Dramatic Theatre and the Kamerny. In the years preceding the Revolution they were passing through a crisis, which during the Revolution



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Three Fat Men* by Yurie Olesha, Act I. Produced by Nikolai Gorchakov. Setting by Boris Erdman.

found its solution in their casting off all that was alien and deformed in the stage traditions, all that obscured the valuable kernel of their art, and in their adopting deeper and more vital creative methods. The Revolution treated the treasures of the past with the greatest care and consideration, but demanded of them real artistic merit and value.

These theatres, however, are very few ; the majority of the theatres have been founded since the Revolution. These include the Meyerhold, the Vakhtangov, the Theatre of the Revolution and the Trade Unions Theatre in Moscow, the Grand Dramatic in Leningrad, and hundreds of theatres in the provinces. With the nationalisation of the theatres, the day of the private theatrical *entrepreneur* was over.

THE STATE REPERTORY COMMITTEE

The theatres to-day are under the control of the People's Commissariat of Education. A special Repertory Committee of this Commissariat is responsible for the repertory of the theatres. It does not permit the performance of plays, which are socially insignificant

or harmful, and it assists the theatres in the correct interpretation of a play.

The Repertory Committee of the People's Commissariat of Education is a creative force in the art of the Soviet Union. It would be incorrect to regard it merely as a form of censorship. Its purpose is not so much censoring as regulating and assisting in the selection of repertories. Representatives of this committee co-operate with theatrical producers in planning new productions. After a rehearsal of the play, discussions are held with the members of the cast, producers, etc., when the standard of the production is criticised and the necessary corrections are made to bring out more clearly the ideas inherent in the piece.

The Repertory Committee takes into account the special line of each theatre, avoids making demands which conflict with the artistic principles of the theatre in question, and generally endeavours to assist in every possible way. Thus contact is established both from a business and a creative point of view and the field of creative art is considerably extended.

Formerly casts were casual assemblies of actors which were reunited every year and

dissolved at the end of each season in search of new jobs. The cast was organised on the basis of rigidly distinct employers, and this obstructed the work. Now we have strongly-welded companies, working together year after year in succession, collectives united not by a contract with a manager, but by a community of artistic and social interests.

The industrial towns of the Donetz Coal-fields, which had never known what it was to see an artistic entertainment, are becoming important theatrical centres. In many Siberian towns, companies of young players have been organised, and all over the Soviet Union there are scores of theatrical studios and schools which train actors and search for new methods in this direction.

THE NON-PROFESSIONAL THEATRICAL MOVEMENT

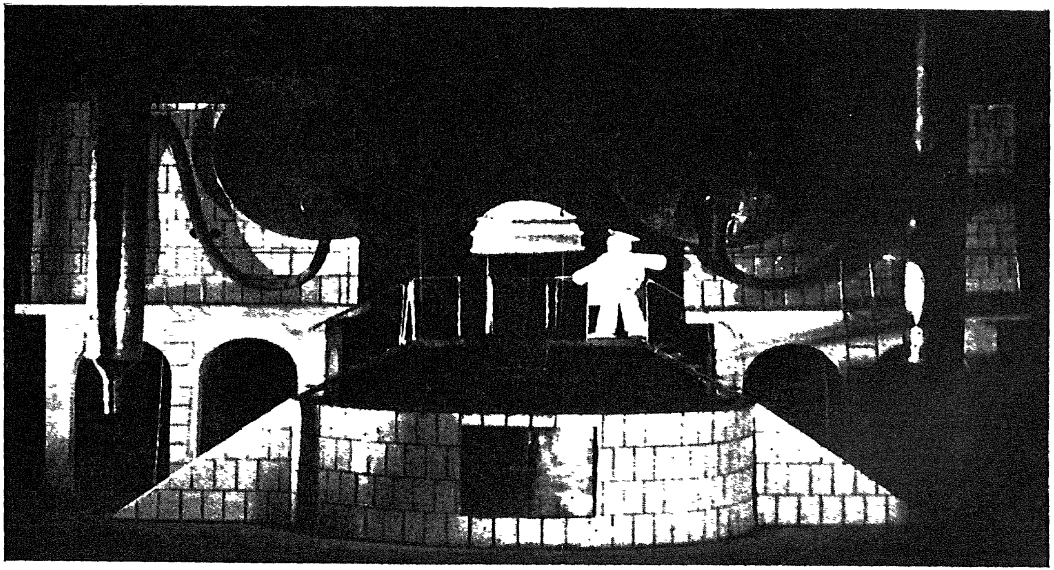
But however rapid the development of the professional theatre, it still remains unable to satisfy entirely the growing demands of the masses. This gives great stimulus to the non-professional theatrical movement, which at the present time embraces hundreds of thousands

of workers. In the factories and offices the theatrical study-circles, directed by people experienced in the training of actors, are working out new methods and creating their own special repertories.

This movement, which has spread all over the Union, is producing new types of theatres. There are, for instance, the Young Workers' Theatres, which from non-professional study-circles have developed into important professional theatres. The non-professional theatre can boast an annual attendance of a hundred and fifty million spectators.

The State lays emphasis on the educational and political importance of the theatre, and pays a great deal of attention to the founding of theatres for children as well as for adults. In numbers of specially adapted theatres, adult actors perform plays suitable for children of various ages. These theatres have worked out their own special methods calculated to suit the mind of the young spectators. In Moscow alone there are eight such children's theatres from which young people derive not only artistic, but also political and ideological benefit.

It was observed in a foregoing paragraph that



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Three Fat Men* by Yurie Olesha, Act II. Produced by Nikolai Gorchakov. Setting by Boris Erdman.

the spectator has become an active influence in the theatre, both directly during the performance, according to the way in which he reacts to it, and through the medium of numerous " spectators' conferences," at which either the repertory or some particular production of the theatre is discussed. Big conferences of juvenile audiences are also held by the children's theatres. They create around themselves a large circle of juvenile theatre-goers, who write regularly to the theatre and on the theatre, and express their aspirations and desires.

Another distinguishing feature of the modern, as compared with the pre-revolutionary theatre, is the development of the theatres of the non-Russian nationalities.

The Olympiad recently held in Moscow was a revelation of the dramatic wealth which now exists in the theatres of the national republics.

The nationalities, liberated from the yoke of Tsarist oppression, are now free to practise their own theatrical art. The Ukraine, Armenia and the other Transcaucasian Republics, White Russia, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan and the wandering gipsies—none of these had any more than an embryo form of theatrical art.

They have now been given the opportunity to create their own theatres and perform in their own language.

Many of these theatres—such as the Georgian Rustavelli, the White Russian Dramatic, the Ukrainian Berezil—are now on a level with the leading theatres of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF THE REPERTORY

A PRINCIPAL FACTOR contributing to the re-birth of the theatre was the advent of the new repertory. The repertory of the bourgeois stage was entirely unprepared for the Revolution and inadequate for the representation of the problems which the Revolution created. It was weighed down and overloaded with trifling ephemeral productions which moved in a narrow circle of individual and personal relationships.

Love and jealousy in a bourgeois setting were the favourite subjects of bourgeois dramatists ; light comedy and sentimental drama were the foundations of the pre-revolutionary theatre.

The bourgeois audience was perfectly satisfied with plays in which the actors showed their professional skill in tragic betrayals and gay amours.

Naturally a repertory of this kind could not be expected to satisfy the demands of the new

audience. But a Soviet repertory could not be produced overnight. It could only be the result of a long and painstaking accumulation of material and of the development of a new form of drama.

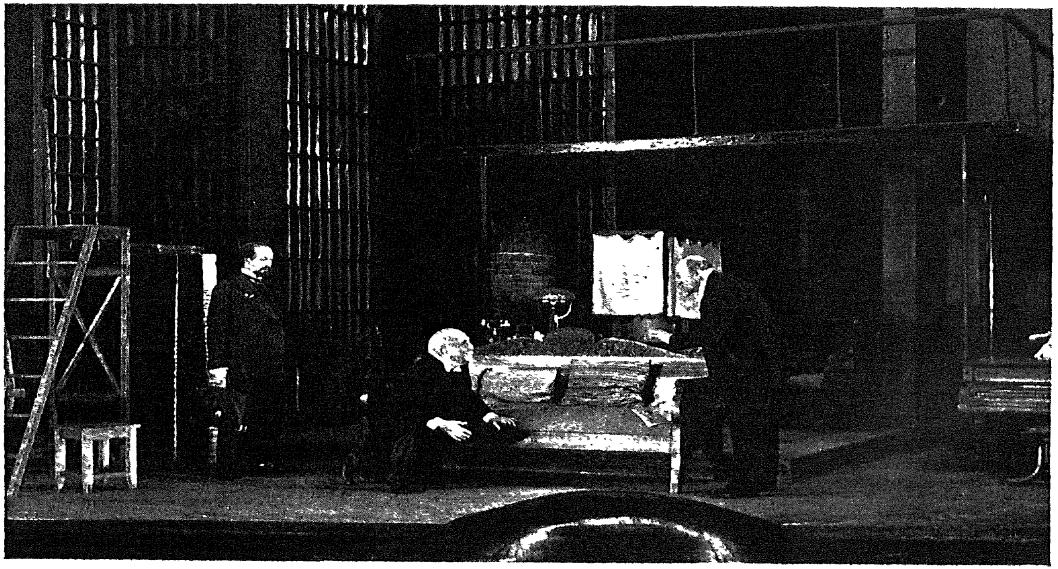
In the beginning, therefore, the theatre was obliged to select its repertory from the heritage of the past.

SELECTION AND ADAPTATION OF BOURGEOIS REPERTORIES

Gradually the lighter and shallower pieces gave way to those of greater social and artistic significance. Then, too, it was not only a question of selection, but of interpretation.

The political rôle of the theatre became more distinct than ever. It was no longer possible for the actors to regard themselves merely as the obedient interpreters of the author's text. Plays were endowed with a newer and deeper meaning by the philosophy with which the stage interpreted them.

Theoreticians of the theatre were particularly emphatic with regard to the independence of the theatre and its right to its own interpretation of stage classics.



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Fear* by A. Afinogenov, Act I. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by N. Shiffrin.

The theatre had to do away with idealistic interpretations of great plays, and work out new points of view in keeping with the revolutionary epoch and socialist construction. It had to " re-discover " the classics and to bring to light that which was really valuable in them.

There is hardly an important drama in world literature that has not appeared on our stage at some time during the last sixteen years.

By presenting on its stage the works of universally known authors, beginning with the Greek and Roman classics and coming down to the greatest achievements of bourgeois art, the Soviet theatre is carrying out one of the principal tasks of socialist culture—the study and critical assimilation of the heritage of the past. A mere enumeration of some of these writers will give an idea of the range : Aristophanes, Æschylus, Sophocles, Calderon, Lope de Vega, Machiavelli, Cervantes, Goldoni, Gozzi, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Molière, Victor Hugo, Schiller, Goethe—the best masterpieces of these and of many others have been shown in the theatres of the Soviet Union.

This interest in the great masters arises out of a thirst for the best that the culture of the past can give and the desire to raise the Soviet theatre to a high level of craftsmanship and so develop its capacity for treating great problems.

The proletarian audience frankly prefers any of Molière's famous comedies to *Charley's Aunt*, and Hugo's romantic drama to the cheap detective story.

When a stage classic is produced here, it is interpreted in an entirely new way. Every effort is made to discover the real style and the main problems of the author and link them up with the social ideas of his time. The stage tries to break the narrow bounds of the work itself in order to get at the age in all its contradictions.

In producing *Hamlet* or *King Lear* the theatre attempted to grasp the ideas and idiosyncrasies of Shakespeare as well as the main contradictions of Shakespeare's passionate epoch.

Through the eyes of Aristophanes the stage looks at ancient Greece. Calderon and Lope de Vega show the audience the life of medieval Spain. Molière guides us to an understanding of the complex relationships between the bourgeoisie, the clergy, and the aristocracy.

While retaining its political significance and its infectious charm, every play at the same time helps us to understand an historical epoch. The past lives again in picturesque images, in vivid colours and exciting episodes.

The producers and actors take nothing for granted, nor do they follow the crude canons of the text-books. A "fresh" acquaintance with the stage classics is being formed. They now appear on our stage in their true guise with their original simplicity and austerity, purified of misinterpretation.

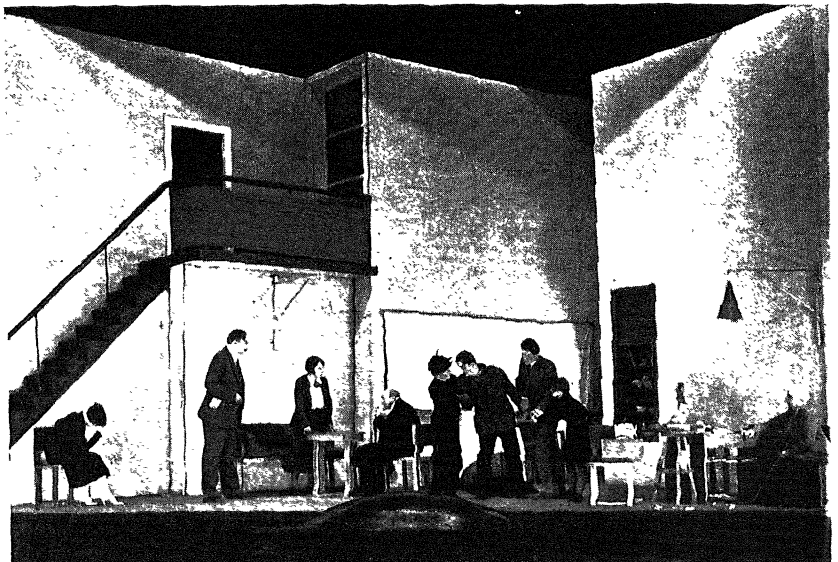
But however great the rôle played by the classics, they cannot of course wholly satisfy the demands of the new audience. Apart from an acquaintance with the heritage of the past the new theatre-going public requires an answer to the burning questions of to-day.

No doubt the whole attitude of the Soviet theatre towards the classics implied an avoidance of an archæological approach. It takes no interest in a museum-like restoration of dead-and-gone theatrical epochs, nor does it allow itself to be tempted by historic naturalism. The classics appear in a purified and revivified form.

Very often—especially during the first years of the Revolution when there was a dearth of modern plays—the theatres made daring and paradoxical attempts at "modernising" the classics by external methods. The reason for this was, as I have said, the lack of good revolutionary plays. Now that the theatre is kept well supplied by revolutionary dramatists, these methods have been discarded.

In its endeavours to bring old plays nearer to our times, the stage of those first years occasionally supplemented them with scenes from modern life, or transferred the action from one epoch to another. For example, the Azerbaijan Theatre presented *Hamlet* as taking place in ancient Azerbaijan, and some of Molière's plays, for example, were turned into comedies of Soviet life.

These exaggerations were healthy signs of the theatre's desire to keep pace with political life. There was as yet no modern drama, but the stage was ahead of literature at least in its desire to speak of our times. There was at the beginning no important dramatic work arising out of the Revolution. The stories and novels that we know appeared much later, when the stage was already reflecting the thoughts and



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Fear* by A. Afinogenov, Act IV. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by N. Shiffrin.

emotions aroused by the Revolution and painstakingly examining every old play to see whether it could not possibly be made to express revolutionary symbols.

Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*, Romain Rolland's *Storming of the Bastille*, Büchner's *Death of Danton*, Mérimée's *Jacquerie*, all went the round of the theatres of the capital and the provinces and were even produced by non-professional dramatic societies. So great was the demand for new subject-matter that the theatre attempted single-handed the creation of a suitable repertory.

The theatre assimilated the great masters, familiarised itself with the theatres of the world during their best periods. By doing so it freed itself from shallow representations of everyday life.

THE EMERGENCE OF SOVIET PLAYWRIGHTS

Familiarity with the theatre of the past taught the Soviet theatre that the greatest playwrights were always in close touch with the stage, and that the fact that they were poets and philosophers did not keep them

from having an excellent knowledge of the stage.

Shakespeare, Molière and Goldoni—not to mention the ancients—pointed the way to closer relations between literature and the theatre. Each of the big Soviet theatres became the centre of a group of dramatists, poets and writers, who are its permanent collaborators.

Most of the plays now running on the Soviet stage are written or composed in association with the theatre, and were revised half a dozen times before they saw the footlights.

A number of authors who had at first no idea of writing for the stage came under the influence of some of the theatres. This at least is what happened in the case of such well-known writers as Yurie Olesha, Leonid Leonov, Vsevolod Ivanov, Babel, Mayakovsky, Bezymensky and others.

Close contact between the dramatists and the theatre ensures depth of treatment and forcefulness of expression. If writers have still a great deal to learn from the theatre as regards technique, the dramatists are of still greater importance to actors and managers in helping them to understand modern problems.

The result has been the political development of the theatre and a more definite dramatic orientation for the writers.

After sixteen years of work, the Soviet dramatists have a long and honourable record of achievements to their credit. The first few years were marked by the appearance of short "agitation" plays. The last few years have been crowned by a remarkable series of works, in which brilliance of plot and rapidity of action are combined with profound social and philosophical analysis.

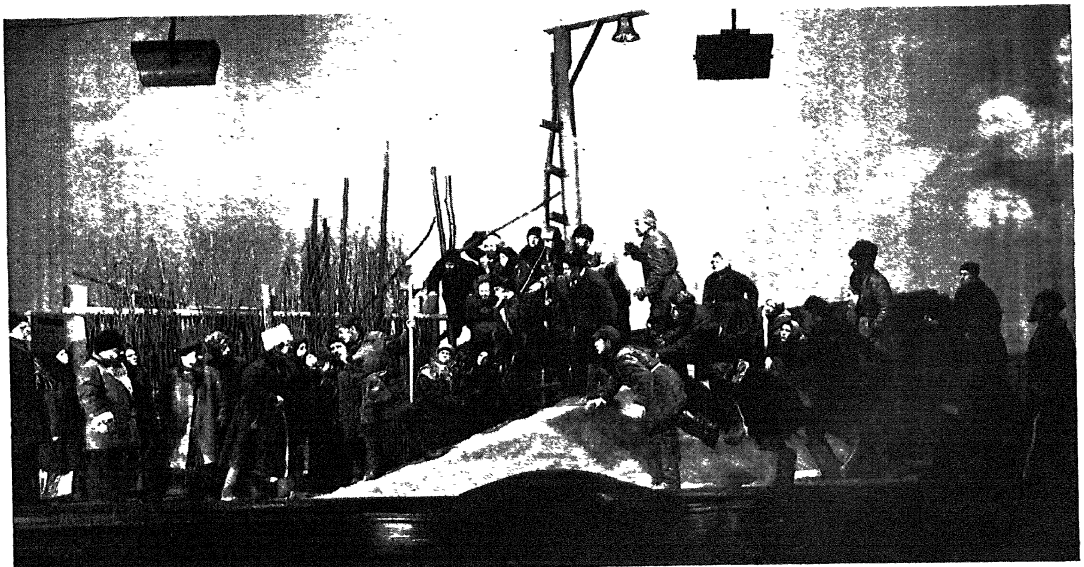
The theatre is interested in the history of old Russia as well as in modern Russia. Tsarist Russia with its social contradictions is the subject of some of the new plays. The times of Ivan the Terrible have received their share of attention. Alexei Tolstoi has written a play about Peter I. Other plays bring us right up to the last days of the monarchy (*The Empress's Conspiracy* by Tolstoi and Shchegolev). The revolutionary movement occupies a special place. Vassili Kamensky's *Stenka Razin* appeared on the first anniversary of the Revolution; Trenyev contributed *The Pugachev Rebellion*. Both these plays treat of the peasant risings against serfdom: these risings were

frequent and widespread, and produced their own heroes. The subject-matter itself suggested the forms to the two dramatists. Kamensky's play is a dramatic poem in which the character of Stenka Razin is treated poetically, while Trenyev gave more attention to the description of the social causes underlying the Pugachev movement. The figure of the rebel leader arose out of a searching analysis of his environment, and Trenyev found his most suitable medium in the monumental historical drama.

INTERPRETATION OF NEW SOCIAL RELATIONS

After a spell of agitation plays and plays of everyday life, the dramatists went on to the interpretation of new social relations and the treatment of great problems in the light of new conditions.

The life of the Soviet intelligentsia, the revolutionised village, scientific institutions and factories, collective farms and administrative offices, a long series of portraits of the Civil War, shock-brigade workers of to-day, the class-war in the west and in the awakening East—all these pass before the eyes of the



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Bread* by Vladimir Kirshon, Act II. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by N. Shiffrin.

audience. The theatre actively participates in all life. It tackles controversial questions. Playwrights search for new methods, and urge the theatres to the discussion of burning questions of the day. They give expression to the enthusiasm of socialist construction, and at the same time scourge and criticise all shortcomings. The forms they use include tragedy and comedy, plays of everyday life and flaring posters.

Sometimes life proves to be beyond their powers of expression. The immensity of the subject-matter cannot be confined within the traditional forms. It forces the writer to seek new methods.

The main theme of the dramatists during the first few years was the Civil War. The theatre realised the richness of the experience of the Revolution. It attempted to catch the social significance of the first revolutionary years and to set up a poetic monument to their memory.

Storm, by Bill-Belotserkovsky, was an important step towards the interpretation of the Civil War. It may be described as a sort of stage diary. He introduced to the stage the grey overcoats, the tattered uniforms of the Red Army, the typical jackets of the workers,

the jerseys of the Young Communists. The short fragmentary scenes of Bill-Belotserkovsky's play described in a simple, epic style the years that had been lived through, disclosed the heroism of the period, not in any stilted, conventional language, but with something of the austerity and simplicity of the Civil War itself.

To this writer the theatre represented, as it were, a place for recollection, reminiscence of great days. This play was noteworthy for its faithful reproduction of fact and detail and its accurate class interpretation.

In *Armoured Train*, Vsevolod Ivanov treated the same theme with a greater intensity of feeling and poetry. The strength of Ivanov's play lies in his ability to blend unique individual traits with fundamental class-distinctions. Each of his heroes is a sharply-defined individual and at the same time typical of his class. The play deals with an episode during the Japanese intervention in Siberia. The leader of the partisan guerilla-fighters, Vershinin, intends to seize an armoured train belonging to the White Guards. He gets in touch with a secret revolutionary organisation. As a result of his self-sacrifice, initiative and

heroism the task is achieved. Ivanov shows rare powers of observation in his treatment of the guerilla-fighter. He never resorts to a facile whitewashing of reality, or to false idealisation. He is plain, truthful and profound. Furmanov's *Rebellion*, Fadeyev's *The Nineteen* and Prut's *Mstislav the Brave* belong to the series of plays on the same theme.

Vsevolod Vishnevsky in *The First Cavalry Army* shows us a number of episodes of the history of Budenny's cavalry. He writes concisely, in staccato style; at times resorting to comedy, at others rising to tragedy. Into these short scenes he compresses the whole heroic story, from the time the army was formed to the days when its former soldiers were engaged in peaceful socialist work.

It can be clearly seen from these plays how far the dramatists' attitude to their subjects has changed. What was once impossible for the theatre to express, what would, in fact, have been unthinkable as a plot for a play, now prompted the playwright to create new dramatic forms.

The further the art of the drama develops the more complex are the problems that arise. The theatre can no longer remain a place for

memories. It is an instrument for the investigation of the new social relations produced by new conditions in a country that is building up socialism.

The Soviet theatre has had to approach such problems as the mutual inter-relations between the bourgeois intelligentsia and the proletariat, the wrecking activities in factories, the class-struggle in the field of science, collectivisation in the village, the changes in family life and morals and all the complicated network of questions that move the country at present.

The Soviet playwright has had to widen the scope of his work. This does not mean that he scorns the individual personality; he simply assigns it to its rightful place. Love, the one absorbing subject of former times, has had to make way for deeper and more complicated questions, and has naturally become subordinate to them. The theatre follows with intense interest the growth of the new socialistic type of man, with his new mentality and the new questions by which he is stirred.

Through a long succession of portrayals of Young Communists, shock-brigade workers, scientists and collective farmers, the stage follows the breakdown of the old social relations

and the growth of new, the destruction of the individualist psychology and its replacement by broader social insight.

THE DRAMA IN RELATION TO THE REVOLUTION

The drama is not confined to any definite form or at any set methods. Life is rich and swift-moving ; it forces the drama to seek new means of expressing it. The drama is a reflection of life and is profoundly, fundamentally true. The truth it seeks is not the accurate duplication of petty events, nor is it photographic naturalism. To be truthful means to bring out the full significance of the historical processes which are taking place ; to show the audience the direction in which they are moving ; to exhibit profound, vivid, heartening and stirring characters typical of our day ; to show, with all the strength, craftsmanship and observation at one's command, *in the name of what* and *for the sake of what* the Revolution is taking place. Tasks like these are difficult and responsible. It is therefore not surprising that the drama can only fulfil them at the cost of much effort and as the result of a long and

persistent search and the maintenance of a critical attitude towards its own work. This is what makes an outstanding poet like Mayakovsky, who subjected the last remains of petty bourgeois existence to merciless ridicule in his comedies *The Bug*, and *The Baths*, use methods almost as blatant as posters, combined with fantastic plots. He described, for example, how Prisypkin, a philistine of to-day, happens to survive and get into a socialist community in the capacity of a museum exhibit and then goes on to draw the sharp contrast between his behaviour and that of the members of the socialist community.

The same attitude is what made Yurie Olesha write his fairy-tale play of *The Three Fat Men*, which easily supplants the fascinating tales of the Brothers Grimm and of Hans Andersen. The scene is a horrible country ruled over and oppressed by three fat men ; we see the rebellious forces of art and science, and a rising which culminates in the overthrow of the hated rulers.

Attention in both cases was concentrated on the representation of our own life apart from all allegory. Side by side with the description of the economic, political and social changes

the authors show us the birth of a new socialist mentality, the birth of a new man.

In *A Conspiracy of Sentiments* Yurie Olesha presents in a mordant but exquisite form the struggle between old and new sentiments in the Soviet Union. We are shown that the heritage of the past, which must be overcome, is rooted in prejudices not yet outlived, in selfishness, in the sense of property.

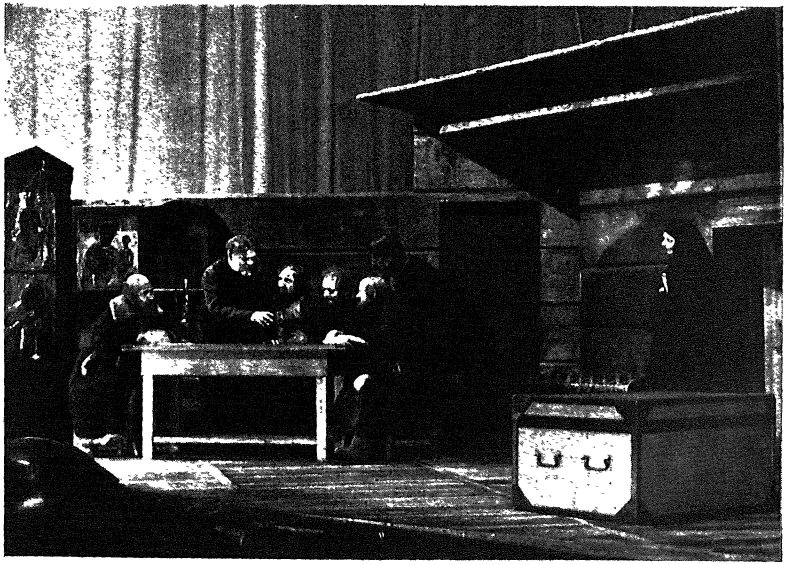
It is against this sense of property as the foundation of bourgeois morals that the new drama aims its hardest blows.

Afinogenov in *Fear* shows us the spirit of change at work among the old intelligentsia. The central figure is Professor Borodin, a famous scientist, the discoverer of an idealistic theory of stimuli. According to this theory, life may be reduced to the stimuli of *anger*, *fear*, *hunger* and *love*. He reads a paper in which the theory is expounded. An enemy of collective work, he looks upon science as a privileged sphere which only he and his kind are allowed to enter. Life, however, ruthlessly smashes his theory to pieces. Where he had seen only fear, fearlessness triumphs. Where he had seen love and friends, he meets traitors. Where he had seen only enemies, he finds a new attitude to

science, an attitude based on friendly, co-operative work. And Borodin goes to work together with the new proletarian intelligentsia, which values science, work and art.

A number of political questions are tackled in a very trenchant manner by Kirschon in his play *Bread.* The two main characters in the play, Mikhailov and Rayevsky, though working together in politics, have widely differing attitudes to life. The action takes place in a village during the grain-collecting campaign ; Rayevsky's work, reflecting his romantic attitude, is rigidly formal. He has no impulse to look at the village as it really is, and therefore cannot bring himself to do so. He fails to see the living forces in the village and their expression in the people. Mikhailov, on the contrary, can see the significance of even the smallest things ; what he sees are not masks but people. He is capable of sacrificing his own feelings. He unites a penetrating political mind with great humanity. Rayevsky turns traitor to the Revolution, but Mikhailov helps to carry it through.

In the character of Mikhailov it is possible to discern the lineaments of that consistent bolshevik that Pogodin shows us in *My Friend.* That play is a picture of the life of to-day, of



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Bread* by Vladimir Kirshon, Act III. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by N. Shiffrin.

socialism's own man. The action takes place in one of the important new factories in construction. Pogodin leads his hero through the whole gamut of difficulties connected with this work of construction. He does not close his eyes to the complexities of the situation, but he sees the new features emerging in the process of construction, he gauges the enthusiasm of the workers, the new collective attitude to work, the feeling of collective responsibility.

A buoyant "social optimism" is characteristic of these unusual subject plays, and they are free of "plots" of the usual love and sentiment kind. The people in the audience follow the unfolding of the action with tense interest, for it contains a response to their own feelings. The subject of plays like *Time, Forward March!* by Katayev, and *The Poem of the Axe* by Pogodin, strike one as particularly novel. The former deals with the socialist competition between two brigades of workers, and the latter with the invention of a new non-rusting steel alloy at one of the Ural metal-works.

THE PLACE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

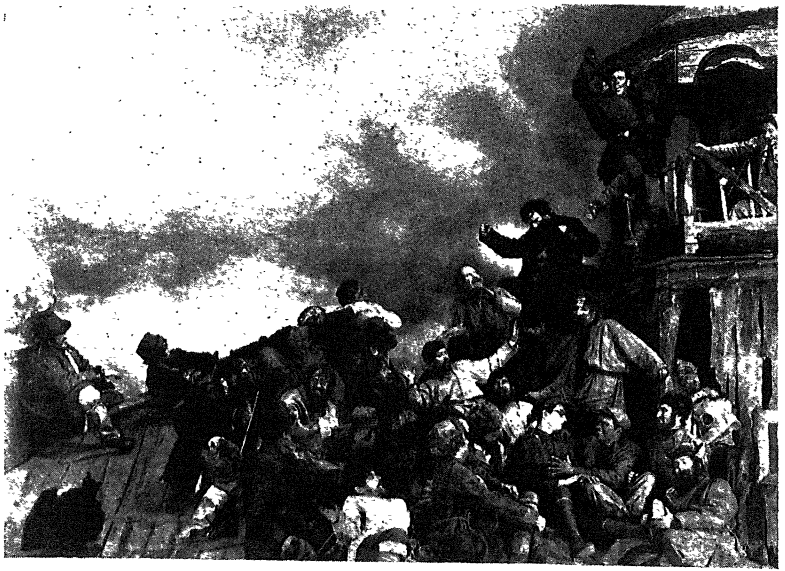
It would be erroneous to suppose that the novelty of the subject and the political content of these plays renders them "unpsychological." On the contrary, the nature of the new social relations and the birth of the new mentality can only be conveyed against the background of new processes taking place in the country, and the further the drama develops the more capable it becomes of psychological analysis.

Gorki's plays, *Egor Bulychev and Some Others* and *Dostigayev and Some Others*, are remarkable in this respect and point the way to Soviet dramatists.

Egor Bulychev is the first part of what is to be a trilogy. It begins in the winter of 1916, and closes with the Revolution of February 1917. The second part, *Dostigayev*, treats of the period between the March and November Revolutions of 1917. Together they form a stage epic. Extraordinarily acute observer as he is, Gorki conveys the atmosphere of those years and draws with sharp, sure strokes a picture of the class-war at the time. We are given a long gallery of portraits—manufacturers, merchants,

the liberal-minded intelligentsia ; and, looming in the background, the first representatives of Bolshevism, of the political party which is to win the victory in the revolutionary struggle. The characters are drawn in with great delicacy. Gorki employs bold and varied methods. At times he attains to a tremendous tragic force and at other times to a mordant irony. He links up his play with the greatest ethical problems. Death and intense loneliness are shown in an unexpected light in the figure of the merchant Bulychev. The fate of the cunning business man, who foresees the crash of the whole system, the destruction of his own business, and feels helpless either to avert the catastrophe or to cure himself of his deadly disease—this fate is regarded by many critics as symbolic of the end of capitalism. Gorki describes a man of strong personality, and his utter loneliness in the midst of his family and his business cares. Bulychev dies cursing God, hating society, and devoid of all hope in the future. Gorki's drama is full of philosophic generalisations. It is a vast social picture. The philosophical drama is becoming one of the main avenues in the development of Soviet literature.

Each of the theatres has its own specific methods of interpreting its repertory. The repertory stimulates a flood of ideas in the mind of the theatre artist. Every artist reaches the Revolution by his own path. The richness and breadth of theatrical life in the Soviet Union is such that it is only possible to touch on the main tendencies in the development of the Soviet stage.



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Armoured Train* by Vsevolod Ivanov, Act II. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by V. Seemov.

CHAPTER III

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

THE MOST IMPORTANT STAGE in the past was that of the Moscow Art Theatre, founded in 1898. Its influence on both Russian and foreign theatrical art is well known. Its artistic standards were extremely high. On the eve of the Revolution, in the years 1914–15, this theatre was passing through a crisis. It refused to produce chauvinistic plays of the type that were being produced at almost all the other theatres, and rejected the works of decadent dramatists. At the same time it found no support in the modern playwrights, who shied at philosophic problems.

The Art Theatre retired into a gloomy silence, conscientiously preserving the high standard of performance in its old plays and training new actors in the quiet of its laboratories. This creative silence, however, had to find an outlet of some kind or other. No living artistic organism with a strong creative impulse can be kept grinding at experimental training

work, no matter how important it may be; and yet the activity of the Art Theatre was for years confined to laboratory work.

This theatre, which had formerly shown brilliant modern productions every year, now declined to produce anything new. From 1913 to 1917 it was faced with the alternative of either admitting openly that further artistic growth was impossible, on account of the reaction and social conditions created by the war, or begin a vigorous search for new themes and new problems to tackle.

NEW PERSPECTIVES OPENED BY THE REVOLUTION

The November Revolution of 1917 at last opened a way out of the dilemma. It presented new and fascinating problems to art and compelled a revaluation of the old methods, no matter how dear to the memory these might be.

It would probably have been easy enough for the Art Theatre to make an outward show of acknowledgment of revolutionary themes and gratify the expectations of the new mass audience, but it could not respond unless it had itself accepted the Revolution in all

sincerity. Empty declarations were not enough ; it must speak with the tongue of creative inspiration.

To be able to create entailed a complete understanding of the inner truth and social justice of the times. There were only two alternatives : either to be silent and reject this truth or accept it and work hard for it. There was no middle way. The art of this theatre was not intended for falsehood.

The strength of this powerful, honest artistic group, composed of the most highly-qualified members of the intelligentsia, was understood by the Soviet Government. The latter came to the assistance of the theatre on every occasion when material difficulties arose. It was not a question of promoting good relations between the Government and the theatre, but of the theatre understanding and accepting the Revolution.

The creation of a new revolutionary repertory for the Moscow Art Theatre was delayed by a series of insurmountable extraneous obstacles. These could, however, only delay the course of the work, not altogether hinder its execution. A considerable number of the actors had gone on tour of the provinces, and

during the Civil War were entirely cut off from Moscow. This weakened the theatre, and a great deal of its work had to be transferred to a number of new studios founded by it. It was only in 1924 that unity was again restored, and from that moment begins the creative life of the young Art Theatre—young inasmuch as the permanent directors, K. S. Stanislavsky and V. I. Nemirovitch-Danchenko, together with the group of old actors, were now supplemented by a strong body of young actors who had grown up during the years of the Revolution.

The problem now arose of the future path to be followed by the Art Theatre. The school of actors accustomed to looking at life through the eyes of individuals was now apparently in direct contradiction with an epoch in which collectivism was the fundamental conception, and in which individual relations had to give way to collective unity.

Would the theatre which had previously expressed with such delicacy and depth the emotions of an individual prove capable of replacing exquisite psychological studies by exalted social feeling and the lessons of communism? These were the questions that would

determine the future of the Art Theatre. Its growth now depended on whether the answer to them would be satisfactory or not.

Some of the critics prophesied the inevitable decadence of its peculiar art. Some of its so-called friends endeavoured to hold it back and confine it to a repetition of old successes. This could only mean the end of the theatre's creative life; it would become a museum theatre, having nothing in common with the life around it. There was also a third viewpoint in the dispute: the viewpoint of those who held that the traditions of the theatre were out of keeping with the problems of the present day, and demanded that they should be abandoned—which was, of course, equivalent to demanding the dissolution of the theatre itself.

None of the three parties was in the right.

"ARMOURED TRAIN"

The truth of the Revolution rang out for the first time with startling force in *Armoured Train* —the play based on the story by Vsevolod Ivanov. It was produced in 1927.

Here was a sense of the great social truth for

which the Revolution was fought. The audien was deeply moved.

One of the characters in the story exclaims—"It's for the sake of truth that our Russia is burning." These words became, according to the Art Theatre, "the leading line of action" in the piece, its "super-problem." They are typical of the simplicity and unexpected humanity with which the author has pictured the Civil War and the partisan risings in Siberia; and the plain but by no means declamatory style in which the author tells us of the austere truth of those great days.

The actors of the Moscow Art Theatre brought to the play an inner experience of the Revolution which united them with the author. The theatre seemed to have been waiting for plays like this—simple and direct, capable of giving the underlying idea of events without losing the feeling of life and the warmth and depth which was the strength of the Art Theatre. Its methods, applied to the new material, acquired a new ring and a new force. The theatre freed its acting system of all that was petty, accidental or irrelevant, all that drew the attention to narrow, personal emotions. It turned to feelings of justice and to

social purposes. The theatre seemed to see behind the characters of the play—behind the partisan leader Vershinin, and the light-hearted young Vasska Okorok, behind the heroic Chinese, behind Nezelassov, the White Guard and Peklevanov, the Chief of the Revolutionary Staff, and hundreds of others whom these typified. The actors sensed with eagerness and pleasure that the thoughts and feelings they personified did not merely belong to certain individuals, but to a new, powerful, creative social milieu. What had formerly seemed individual and private was now accepted by the theatre as something general and socially conditioned. Every character is now interpreted by the theatre from the point of view of the class to which it belongs and the environment from which it springs.

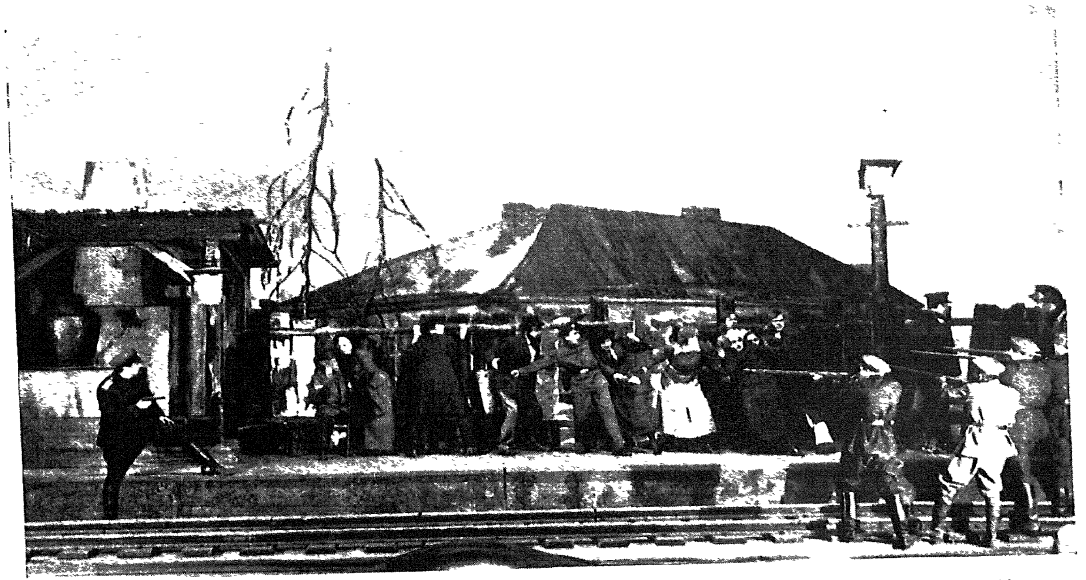
From that time on, the Moscow Art Theatre has directed all its efforts to combining the understanding of human character and the craftsmanship of great players with a profound analysis of social psychology. The theatre has never given up its guiding principles of work, its richest treasures. It has simply found a newer and more fruitful field for them. It has, as it were, extended the confines of its art and

taken a wider view of life. It has breathed freely and found a point of contact uniting individuals with the social groups that produced them.

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF THE ACTOR

The Art Theatre has thought a great deal about the revaluation of the traditional standards and ethical canons to which it was accustomed. The habitual formulas for solving problems of duty, family honour, and love arose again in the light of new social relations. In former times it had kept out of politics. Now it devoted quite a number of performances to political problems of the day. It was only in connection with the new attitude and the new subjects that questions of form were raised, since form, as of old, was for the Art Theatre only a vehicle for the fine and accurate transmission of an inward purpose, and its ideational stimulus.

The actor remained, as formerly, the centre of dramatic art. A few rather obtuse critics were, of course, ready to regard this attention to the actor as a confirmation of individualism on the stage. It is scarcely necessary to refute this. The Art Theatre treated the actor as the



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Armoured Train* by Vsevolod Ivanov, Act III. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by V. Seemov.

basic and principal medium of its art, and not at all as a means of gratifying self-sufficient individualism on the stage.

On the contrary, the longer the Art Theatre laboured, the clearer it became that the individuality of the actor could and should become the socialist theatre's means of expression in the epoch of socialist construction or future communism. The profound emotions that stirred millions of people could be imparted to the audience through the medium of the actor much more easily than by all the formal tricks that the inventiveness of the producer might devise.

The Art Theatre has persisted in its defence of the technique of acting and in its understanding of the art of acting. It maintains that during the epoch of the Revolution simplicity and truth in acting were more necessary than ever. It held that a false, declamatory style and an artificial, calculated expression of feeling was as foreign to this austere and powerful epoch as are tinsel and ostentation.

All this often made the theatre much more ascetic in its performances than other theatres, and caused it to prefer severity to bright decorations and gay costumes.

INTERPRETATION OF THE CLASSICS

One of the most outstanding productions was Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, produced in 1930. This was a great test for the theatre. There was the danger of either giving way to Tolstoi's religio-philosophic doctrine, of taking up his position, or on the other hand, of totally disregarding its social and philosophical importance, and basing the play on the love affair of Nekhlyudov and Katherine, as had been done in all previous adaptations of the novel for the stage.

The Moscow Art Theatre saw beyond Tolstoi's moralising and beyond the love affair between a wealthy landowner and a servant. It saw a splendid social canvas, a picture of Tsarist Russia, of oppression, of the ignorance of the peasantry and the luxurious life of the aristocracy.

The moralisings of Tolstoi were ruthlessly sacrificed and replaced by an exposure of the system. This merciless criticism lay at the foundations of the production and was expressed not only in the general construction of the play but also in the character of "the author mouthpiece." This part was played

simply and finely by Kachalov, one of the great actors of the Art Theatre, who had to interpret the author's and, at the same time, the theatre's attitude to the past. The novel was divided into four big sections : the trial, the prison, the village, and the march to Siberia.

In each of these, through the medium of many typical scenes and characters, the theatre exposed the soulless formality of the court, the hopelessness of the prison, the hypocrisy of the church service, the poverty and gloom of the countryside, and hard labour in Siberia—where people were entirely at the mercy of their gaolers.

People moved by profound emotions, but deformed and thwarted by the epoch ; men and women doomed to exile in Siberia—people of Tsarist Russia live again for us in these scenes, live with that transparent clarity and distinctness which are the distinguishing features of Tolstoi's unique style. Other examples of similar interpretations of the classics were *The Marriage of Figaro* (produced in 1927), Ostrovsky's *The Ardent Heart* (1926), and Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1932).

In *The Ardent Heart*[1] and *Dead Souls*[2] the theatre gave us an account of life in the provinces before the serf system was abolished—an account of an uncivilised country and its absurdities, of the comical and terrible folk inhabiting it. Here the Art Theatre disclosed a whole epoch to us.

While remaining realistic, the theatre exposed with extreme boldness the most horrible features of old Russia. It was obviously trying to find and to represent elemental forces which were actually the expression of certain class and social relations.

The theatre also wanted to give an outlet to the undercurrents hidden in that dismal, grey, provincial life. It wanted to point out that the distinguishing features of that easy-going existence were not good humour, nor even stupidity, but lust, greed and hatred. It

[1] *The Ardent Heart* was written by Ostrovsky in 1869. The action takes place in the thirties of last century. It shows the struggle of the daughter of a rich merchant for her right to love and her personal freedom.

[2] *Dead Souls* is the greatest of Gogol's works. The action of this adaptation takes place in the thirties and presents a powerful picture of old Russia. Here are shown corrupt tyrannical officials and uncivilised landowners. The chief character is the adventurer, Chichikov, who buys up "dead souls," i.e., dead serfs still registered in the official lists as living. These purchases are to bring Chichikov prosperity and the position of a great landowner possessing many serfs.

MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Resurrection* by Leo Tolstoi, adapted for the theatre by F. Raskolnikoff. Act V. Produced by Ilya Sudakov. Setting by Vladimir Dmitriev. Art Director, Nemirovitch-Danchenko.

took up an attitude of moral and social censure towards old Russia.

The contractor Kilynov, the merchant Gordaboyev and the clerk Narkiss (in *The Ardent Heart*) are, in their exaggerated greed, the stage masks, as it were, of the Russia of their day.

The theatre showed an excellent understanding of Ostrovsky's peculiar style, and Stanislavsky expressed it in a profoundly realistic performance. The whole rhythm of the performance was an expression of the ponderous, unchanging patriarchal life in the provinces, but at the same time it gave a brightly-coloured picture. Stanislavsky used the tradition of Russian folk-acting and the circus to convey the vivid colours of real life.

In the case of Gogol's philosophic epic *Dead Souls*, the theatre endeavoured to turn it into a finished comedy of the type of his plays—*The Inspector-General* and *The Marriage*—using as a pivot the adventures of Chichikov and his disastrous attempt to buy up dead serfs.

FUNDAMENTAL ARTISTIC QUALITY
THE AIM

All productions of stage classics tend to show ever more clearly the Moscow Art Theatre's main purpose—to disclose in great social and psychological characters the philosophic idea underlying the play ; to approach the philosophic representation of what we might call the " inner biography of the hero " with all the power at its command. It is precisely this quality that distinguishes the art of this theatre from other theatrical tendencies.

It is only natural that in its treatment of contemporary life, the Art Theatre should remain true to its fundamental artistic point of view. It has not stood still. In the search for ways to show class enthusiasm and social truth, the new ethics, and in the study of political problems, the theatre depended on fundamental artistic quality. It applied to modern themes the methods it had taken many years to work out, altering and developing them as time went on. This was by no means easy for the theatre. The way leading from the past to the future was beset with many contradictions.

It was not a question of mere photographic

reproduction of life, for the Art Theatre had long since abandoned faithful, naturalistic imitation. In its introduction of beauty and the force of reality to the stage, the theatre was leaning upon its tradition of "revealing the inner nature of the characters."

Stanislavsky speaks of a certain "realism of the soul"—by which he means psychological truth. Through its understanding of psychological truth, the Art Theatre attained its success in the representation of the Civil War (*Armoured Train*), and of the class-struggle in science (*Fear*) and in the village (*Bread*). The more the theatre came into contact with actuality, the more convinced it became of the relationship between the individual and his social background.

Every artist has a way of his own, which is complex and individual. So it was with the Art Theatre. The epoch expresses itself through self-contained values which the theatre must find in its characters. The psychological storms that rage within an individual are no more than the result of stormy revolutionary changes. It is through that attitude that the Moscow Art Theatre united forces with the Revolution.

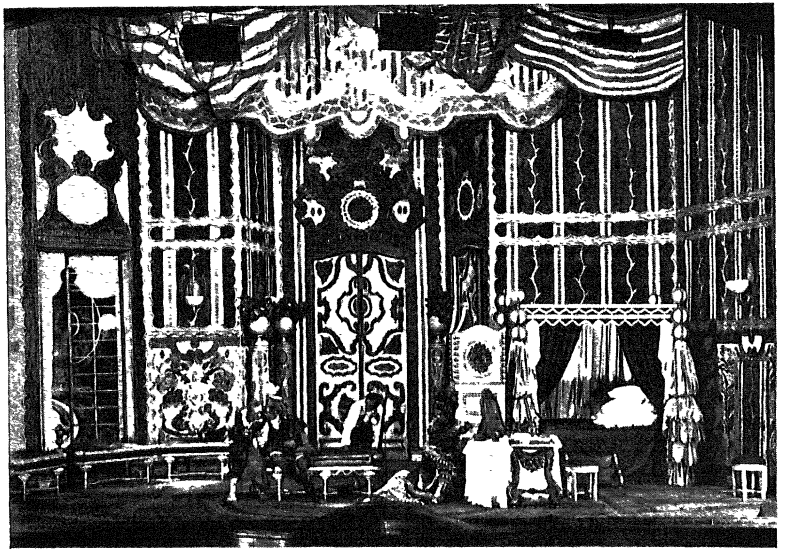
That was what happened with *Armoured*

Train. That is what happened with *Fear*, which treats of modern scientists, of the new intelligentsia, of the contradictions between the past and present.

The Art Theatre pursues its ideas with extraordinary consistency and resolution. It looks upon the ideological reaction of the spectator to the performance as the effect of the play. The attention of the audience must be held by the play, the spectator must be moved and delighted, so that his thoughts may return to the play and thus arrive at definite conclusions regarding the central social idea contained in it.

These are the aims of the Art Theatre. Starting from its attitude towards the actor, the Art Theatre has produced a series of modern plays in which political ideas are interwoven with a strong emotional appeal and with great realism.

The performances given at the Moscow Art Theatre show that the life of to-day forces itself on the stage through emotion, ideational forcefulness and dramatic conviction. They also show clearly that each is bound up with a philosophic or social idea, and that the latter is the principal inner form of the performance.



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Marriage of Figaro* by Beaumarchais, Act II. Produced by Boris Vershilov and Elisabeth Teuleshev. Setting by Alexander Galavin. Art Director, K. Stanislavsky.

CHAPTER IV

MEYERHOLD

THE POSITION occupied by Vsevolod Meyerhold is the direct opposite of that of the Art Theatre. In the course of his stormy thirty-five years of theatre work, Meyerhold has gone through an important evolution. The leader of the more ruthless modernists, he is engaged in a continuous quest for new ways of approaching the construction of the play. His hostility and opposition to the Art Theatre is the more determined only because he was himself a member of its first company and worked with it for four years.

Always the innovator, it was he who introduced to the stage the principle of conventional "stylisation." It was he who revived the rich and splendid Molière productions. He reformed the opera, and his production of Gluck's *Orpheus* was one of severe and delicate beauty. He marches untiringly ahead and delights in solving great stage problems. The October Revolution opened vast possibilities

before him. In his first post-revolutionary productions, Meyerhold stated his attitude to the Revolution in no ambiguous way. An "October Revolution" was what was needed in the theatre, he said—meaning that both subject-matter and form required revolutionising.

HIS FIGHT AGAINST IDEALISM AND REACTION

His long drawn out struggle with the old theatre now became part of the struggle against idealistic philosophy and political reaction. It was not only against what appeared to him to be the outworn form of the psychological theatre that this fierce and passionate artist revolted. It was in the name of a new æsthetics and a new ethics. He saw a connection between the ruin of the old theatre and the breakdown of the worn-out rules of life which had always been so hateful to him. This doctrine was attractive to a number of theoreticians, critics and lovers of the theatre who were prominent in politics.

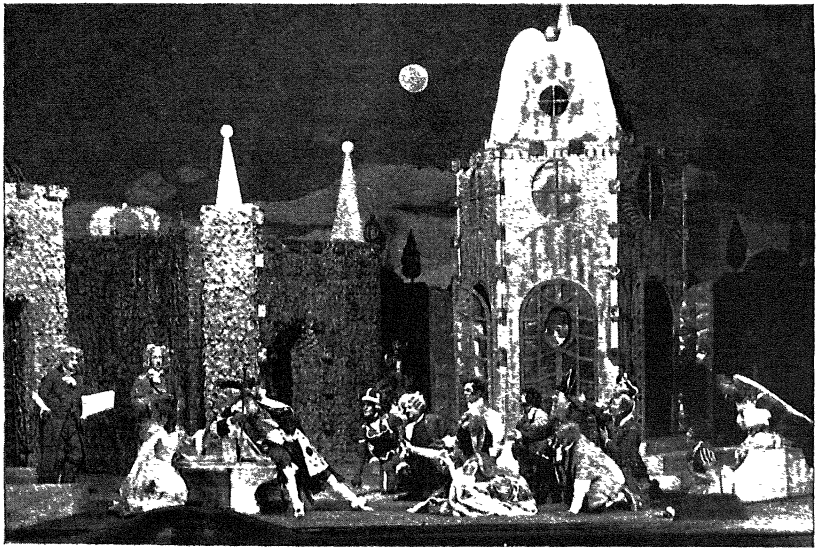
In spite of the absence of a suitable repertory, Meyerhold went ahead with his "October Revolution in the Theatre," arousing the

indignation of one side and the hopes of the other. Having no repertory ready to hand, he decided to create one. Taking up the tradition of those periods in the history of the theatre which were most " theatrical," when theatres had their own playwrights, Meyerhold took upon himself the rôle of the absent dramatist. He saw the fundamental contradiction between the feudal court type of theatre, with its box of a stage, and the needs of our time. Meyerhold declared war on the accepted architecture of the stage. With his hatred of the " intimate " style in acting, a quality he regarded as foreign to the hardness and severity of the Civil War period, Meyerhold set out to discover new " poster " methods for the actor. He was founding a theatre that would be of as much direct assistance to the work of construction and the defence of the Soviet State as any other government institution.

Meyerhold had long felt that theatre art must be independent and that the producer had a right to interpret plays as freely as he wished. This led him to still bolder conclusions. The alterations he made in plays were inevitable and artistically legitimate. During those revolutionary years the artistic demand for the

recasting of old plays was seconded by social necessity. It was not only a matter of this or that interpretation of a character; the producer made the characters attractive or repulsive according to class feeling. Nor did this alteration consist merely of "cutting"—a technique accepted in even the most conservative of the theatres. It was a question of the radical revision of the text, a process capable of imparting to it a character much closer to the life of to-day than the author could ever have dreamed of. In this way Meyerhold breathed new life into old plays.

His first performance in 1920 gave evidence of a violent breach with all the usual stage forms. Emile Verhaeren's tragedy, *Les Aubes*, was produced by Meyerhold as a symbolic expression of the revolutionary struggle. The play was interspersed with reports of the victories won by the Red Army in the Civil War. It wound up with the "Internationale." The members of the chorus that sang it were dressed in ordinary clothes and helped to connect the audience with the stage. The chorus also emphasised what was happening on the stage by explanatory remarks, thus evoking hatred of some characters, love of another, enthusiasm



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*The Marriage of Figaro* by Beaumarchais, Act V. Produced by Boris Vershilov and Elisabeth Teuleshev. Setting by Alexander Galavin. Art Director, K. Stanislavsky.

for a third and so on. After the successful production of *Les Aubes*, several theatres began a determined revision of the classics. Even before the production of *Les Aubes*, Meyerhold's companion at the time, Valeri Bebutov, had reduced Schiller's *William Tell* to two short acts of which Tell's struggle with Gessler was the centre.

In his subsequent productions Meyerhold did away with the curtain, employed various devices to unite the audience with the stage, and to bring out the conventional side of the theatrical performance.

The sworn enemy of naturalism, he would not have representations of real life. He created a special stage world which condensed the atmosphere of modern life much more than a realistic imitation of it would.

THE PRODUCER'S RIGHT TO "EDIT"

Meyerhold called himself the " author of the production." He assumed complete responsibility for the carrying out of his ideas. The artist, the author and the actor took, as it were, second place. To him they were merely separate elements of the theatre, which he, their

guide, had to direct with a firm, unerring hand.

The whole production is dominated by Meyerhold's strong, poetical personality, and it is for the expressing of this personality that Meyerhold co-operates with so much passion and enthusiasm with the actor, the artist, the author, the decorator and the composer.

Placed in the epoch of the Revolution, Meyerhold endeavoured to embrace the whole of life. Whatever phenomena came within his range of vision, he reproduced with a maximum of convincing vividness. In contrast to the method of the Art Theatre, which aims at the monumental in its performances and is always reluctant to use plays that are divided up into a number of scenes, the Meyerhold Theatre splits up a drama into episodes, trying to find for each episode the most characteristic mode of expression. He " edits " a play as one " edits " a film.

The theme does not unfold itself as the consecutive development of a plot, but as a succession of pictures following in accordance with principles of association and contrast. Meyerhold looks at a cross-section of life, taken horizontally, not vertically.

The Moscow Art Theatre aims at penetrating

deep into life, Meyerhold at embracing the whole of it. He obtains powerful effects by the combination of various and at times sharply-contrasting episodes.

He has learnt the fundamental rules of drama from Shakespeare. For his methods of building up a production, Meyerhold deserves the title of " The Shakespeare of Modern Russia." He likes to bring together tragedy and comedy, the sublime and the lowly. He moves the audience to profound tragic emotion, only to drag it back a moment later to the roughest clowning. His audience must be kept constantly in a state of excitement, its interest and curiosity must never be allowed to flag.

Every new production of Meyerhold's is the scene of a struggle with his own past. He wants to kill the æstheticism which was imposed on his early productions by pre-revolutionary conditions. He wants to get rid of the idealistic, abstract philosophy that permitted him to produce Alexander Blok's lyrical drama *The Show-booth*, and to interpret sympathetically the plays of the Symbolists and the Decadents. Meyerhold fights the past in himself so as to be able to build up a new theatre-form.

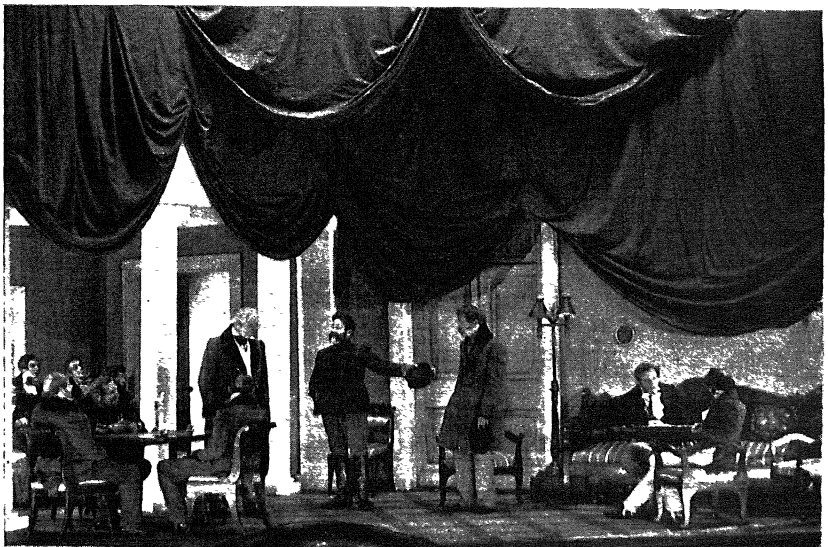
He found his first support in the slogan of

the politico-agitational theatre. During the period of war-time communism, when the rest of the theatres were quietly going ahead with the production of the classics or with repetitions of old work, Meyerhold felt the necessity for placing the stage in the very heart of the storm and using it for agitational and propagandist purposes. He used the traditions of the Shakespearean open-air theatre to combat the psychological theatre. He even studied the Chinese theatre for new modes of acting.

"SOCIO-MECHANICS" OF THE STAGE

In opposition to the "inward technique" of the Art Theatre, Meyerhold laid stress on outward technique, but he did not wish to æstheticise the theatre.

The experiments of his professional enemy, Tairov of the Kamerny Theatre, were unacceptable to him. He rejected completely Tairov's practice which led to the creation of a consistent æsthetic structure. It was neither in real-life naturalism nor in æsthetic refinement that he looked for the "foundations of the new actor." He sought rather in purposeful movement and athletic lightness and agility



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Dead Souls* by N. Gogol, adapted for the theatre by M. Bulgakov, Act II. Produced by V. Sachnovsky. Setting by V. Seemov. Art Director, K. Stanislavsky.

for the new type of actor, an actor who could control his body with perfect precision.

Meyerhold built up grotesque, exaggerated characters, whose gestures, movements and mimicry expressed the social essence of the people they represented.

The further he went in this field, the more clearly he saw that the musical faculty was the real foundation of the revolution he was carrying out on the stage. It is not merely that he provides a musical accompaniment to his performances (the usual practice of most Moscow theatres). What he is after is a peculiar rhythm, individual to each character. He composes his productions along the lines of a symphony, discovering, as it were, the scenic music of the Revolution.

Meyerhold's æsthetic problems are always merged with the ideological. Meyerhold takes as his cue the psychology of the spectator. He demands forcefulness, precision and an immediate effect on the audience. He is poles away from a psychological approach. In transposing a character, he finds it necessary to bring out and emphasise both the good and bad qualities in the light of the class feeling of to-day. The bad qualities must be exaggerated and the

good qualities purified to a pitch of heroic emotion. Instead of thinking of the actor in terms of " experience " or " emotion," Meyerhold thinks of the actor as a tribune, ready to lead the masses he has inspired, as the masses were led by the great actors of the theatrical epochs, and by the famous Russian actress Yermolova. In the course of his search of methods for the " actor-tribune," he has founded a system known as " bio-mechanics." He frees himself from both the well-worn *cliché* of the psychological naturalistic type of acting and the newly-established æsthetic *cliché* with its refined and beautified movements. Meyerhold bases his scenic system on the study of reflexes and of the physical qualities of the actor, who should possess a well-trained body and at any moment be able to carry out any task imposed on him by the producer. Variety helps to train the actor. The real idea of the system was discovered by Lunacharsky during a discussion. He suggested " socio-mechanics " as a suitable name for Meyerhold's system, since it was intended to demonstrate on the stage the more outstanding class-qualities of the characters represented.

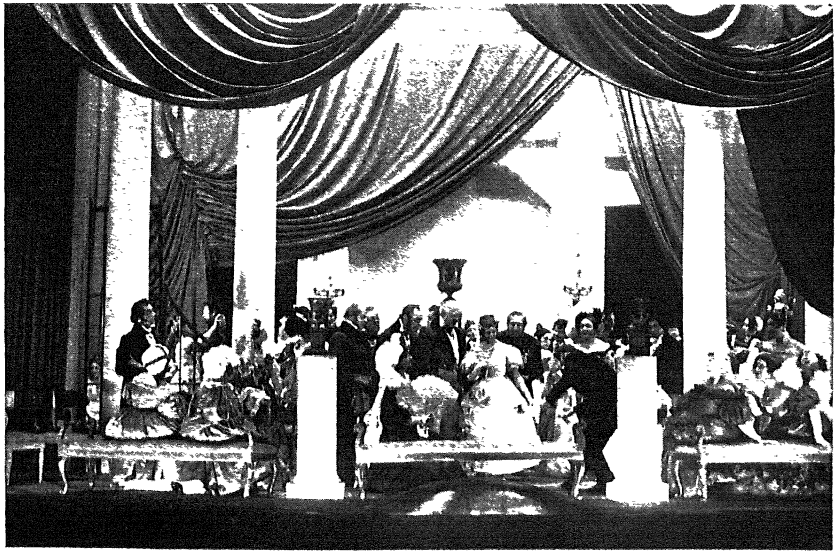
CONSTRUCTIONAL STAGING

In some of Meyerhold's productions this principle of "demonstrating" was followed up very clearly. During the experimental rehearsals for *The Magnificent Cuckold*, the actors played with practically no make-up at all, depending entirely on their skill as actors. The standard dress they wore simplified the carrying out of the technical side and disguised none of their defects, as a fancy costume might have done. In thus laying bare the skill of the actor and emphasising his part as an agitator, Meyerhold brought him closer to life itself, to its essence, its will, its social sources. In Meyerhold's later work it is clear that the theatre is being led still further away from formal super-refinement and towards organic vital power. Meyerhold's principal attack was directed not so much against the psychological naturalistic type of theatre as against the abstract-formal type. He hastened to free the stage from the profusion of decoration and scenery that linked it with the petty-bourgeois theatres. The narrow box-stage did not satisfy him, he dreamed of a theatre of monumental proportions. He did away with the curtain, with the

wings, and the footlights ; laid open the back of the stage, thus extending the stage in all directions.

The audience's range of vision was no longer limited by conventional boundaries, but could take in the whole scenic space within which the action was taking place. In his former productions at the Alexandria and Maria Theatres in Leningrad, Meyerhold had utilised the proscenium in his attempt to link the stage with the auditorium. What had previously appeared as nothing more than an abstract, artistic innovation, now became for Meyerhold an inward necessity. The audience must not be cut off from the actor. In *Les Aubes* the chorus was kept as near as possible to the audience. In *Mystery Bouffe*—Mayakovsky's agitational play—Meyerhold, not content with getting rid of the footlights, connected the auditorium with the stage by means of planking. He also carried the action into the boxes, which thus became part of the stage-space.

It is true that constructional staging had been attempted in a number of theatres even before Meyerhold's time, but in this field, as in others where he had rebelled against traditional methods, he was much more daring in carrying



MOSCOW ART THEATRE.—*Dead Souls* by N. Gogol, adapted for the theatre by M. Bulgakov, Act III. Produced by V. Sachnovsky. Setting by V. Seemov. Art Director, K. Stanislavksy.

out his ideas and much more original in finding a means of outward expression for them. They were naked, unyielding materials—the iron and wood that he introduced to the stage along with the naked stage actions. There was something in their hard, inflexible lines that seemed to respond to a cold, stern age which would indulge in no unnecessary decoration. The wandering spot-light exaggerated the chill of the iron, the gleam of the steel and the hardness of the wood. In *The World on End*, Meyerhold showed a sort of railway-bridge around and upon which the action of this anti-imperialist tragedy unfolded. In *The Magnificent Cuckold*, only the bare framework of the house was indicated in which the adventures and sufferings of the unfortunate cuckold took place. The realism of the materials used was intended to emphasise the clear and consecutive development of the drama.

Having unburdened himself of the necessity for psychological and æsthetic refinement, Meyerhold opened war on abstractness. He liked everything abrupt, clear-cut and definite. From that time on he worked with nothing but concrete material, selecting from it the most expressive elements needed for the presentation

of the whole. He introduced new elements into his productions. He was never afraid of the abrupt invasion of life on to the stage. He sent the rhythm of the Civil War reverberating through the auditorium in the shape of a car or a motor-cycle. He concentrated attention on the exaggerated show of fear in the negative heroes. Realising the power of the cinema, he drew it into his service. He saw that the Civil War audience was over-burdened with impressions of events of tremendous importance, passing in rapid, inexorable succession, and that therefore it could not fix its attention on a single prolonged act. That was why he divided plays up into crowded episodes with a maximum of expressiveness in each. He saw, too, that one of the main methods of piecing a film together is based on the juxtaposition of contrasts. That was how the intermingling of the tragic and the comic of the highest and the most mercilessly-parodied emotions came about in the majority of Meyerhold's plays, as for instance, in *The World on End* where circus and farce are linked with sublime tragedy. Meyerhold observed that a sharp division of the characters according to their good and bad qualities appealed to the audience.

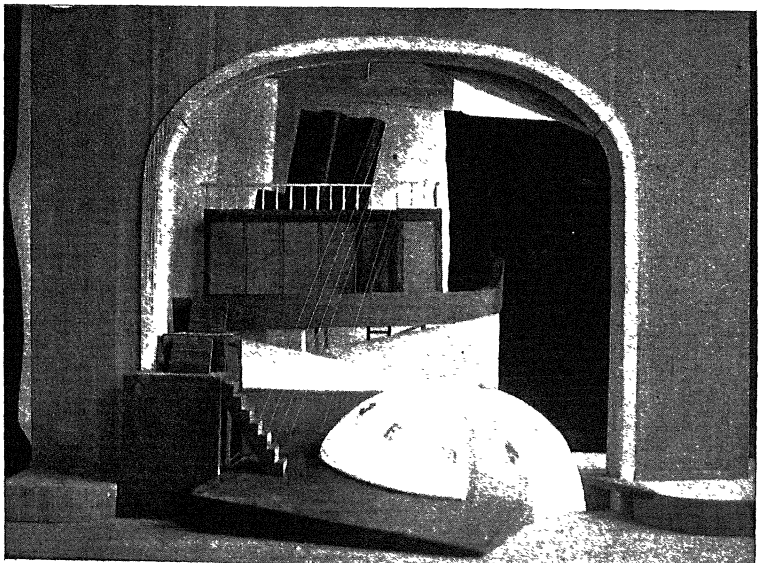
In speaking of the antecedents of Meyerhold's theatre, it would only be right to recall the Shakespearean stage, the stage of the Middle Ages, the popular melodrama played in the streets and squares—all of whose elements were constructed on pretty much the same lines as Meyerhold's. The direction in which he was moving became particularly clear after his production of Ostrovsky's play *The Forest.* This production, which was enriched by a powerful lyricism, demonstrated that the theatre permitted of a new æsthetic application of its principles. Meyerhold restored the popular melodrama, but, unlike his former colleagues, he did not allow it to be an exhibition of aimless, æsthetic acting. On the contrary, he linked it closely with the life around him which he so ruthlessly laid bare. He filled the theatre with his own personality, made of it a living protest. During the Civil War, through the medium of *Les Aubes*, he had summoned the audience to the victorious World Revolution and ridiculed the Die-hards of the antagonistic old world in *Mystery Bouffe*, while he disclosed the heroism of the Civil War in *The World on End* and *The Army Commander.* When the period of military communism came to an end, and the period of

construction began, Meyerhold, the passionate artist, the champion of an "October Revolution in the Theatre," set about to confirm the artistic laws he had worked out. Æsthetisation was the natural culmination of Meyerhold's long and laborious career. He has consolidated it during the last few years, when the contours of the U.S.S.R. theatre in general were becoming clearer and more sharply defined.

THE PLACE OF ARTISTIC DETAIL

His methods are now being brought to a high æsthetic level of expression. Having destroyed the old tinsel beauty and mere gaudiness, Meyerhold has succeeded in finding the principles of a new beauty that responds to his craftsmanship and refined taste.

In his production of *The Teacher Bubus*, a comedy by Faiko, dealing with modern life in Europe, Meyerhold finds in the mournful melodies of Chopin a fit expression of doomed Western Europe. There is a sort of decadent morbid beauty in the outward appearance of the piece. He shows delicacy in his methods and inventiveness in the setting. The actors are



MEYERHOLD THEATRE.— *Mystery Bouffe* by V. Mayakovsky.
Directed by Meyerhold.

surrounded by a lattice-work of bamboo poles which emit a weird and doleful note when touched. The languid dancing movements of the actors, combined with the unexpectedness of the *mise-en-scène*, supply a rhythm of hopelessness and of dead beauty.

The adaptation of Herman's novel *Introduction*, is built upon the contrast between Western and Soviet civilisation. The traits peculiar to Bubus are connected here with a vigorous rhythm, bright-toned details, which give an effect of bravery, vitality and strength.

In the course of the last few years Meyerhold has become a master of artistic detail calculated to rouse the greatest number of rich and complex associations in the mind of the audience.

He is capable of obtaining such strong effects from the actor, of placing him in such a *mise-en-scène* and such a personal lighting that the image created will be long-remembered for its outward expression alone.

Take, for instance, that scene in *Introduction*, where the funeral of the German communist's son, who has been killed, takes place. The father is trying to dress the stiffening figure in his best coat, by the pale light of flickering

candles. A few poor wreaths, a few mournful chords of music—leave an impression of poignant pain.

The last few years found Meyerhold turning more and more to the classics. He has his own method of dealing with them. The subject of the play hardly interests him, he is always engrossed in the vital subject of the author's personality, which for him outgrows the bounds of the play.

In the case of Gogol's *Inspector-General*, for instance, it is not so much of the play that Meyerhold is thinking, as of the uncovering of Gogol's philosophy.

In the case of *Kretchinsky's Wedding* by Sukhovo-Kobylin, he dispenses with the light French-comedy side of the play, discerning through it the bitter, pessimistic philosophy of the author and his condemnation of life and of old Russia.

Meyerhold steps beyond the limits of comedy and drama to reach the core of the author's inmost self.

The atmosphere of the reign of Nicholas I is given in some of the admirable scenes of *Inspector-General*. The figures stand out impressively against the sparingly treated

background and severe settings. The whole performance is permeated with music. The colour-combinations in the costumes form a composition suggestive of an old masterpiece come to life. With exquisite taste Meyerhold builds up *mise-en-scènes* which recall the great traditions of painting, but his art remains subordinated to his philosophic concept.

It may not always be possible to accept Meyerhold's interpretation of a play, but it is never possible to remain unmoved by his profound comprehension of the great Russian writers.

Never before has Gogol's gloomy mystical duality, or Sukhovo-Kobylin's bitter irony, or Griboyedov's idealistic scepticism been presented in such an unforgettable way as on the Meyerhold stage. He extends the boundaries of modern productions in the same way, to attain a generalisation of great modern phenomena.

Vsevolod Vishnevsky has written a play called *The Last Decisive Battle*, in which he tried to picture possible future wars in the cause of socialism.

Meyerhold did not find this sufficient material for his production, and therefore took for

the main subject the problems of the clash between the old and the new in our own time.

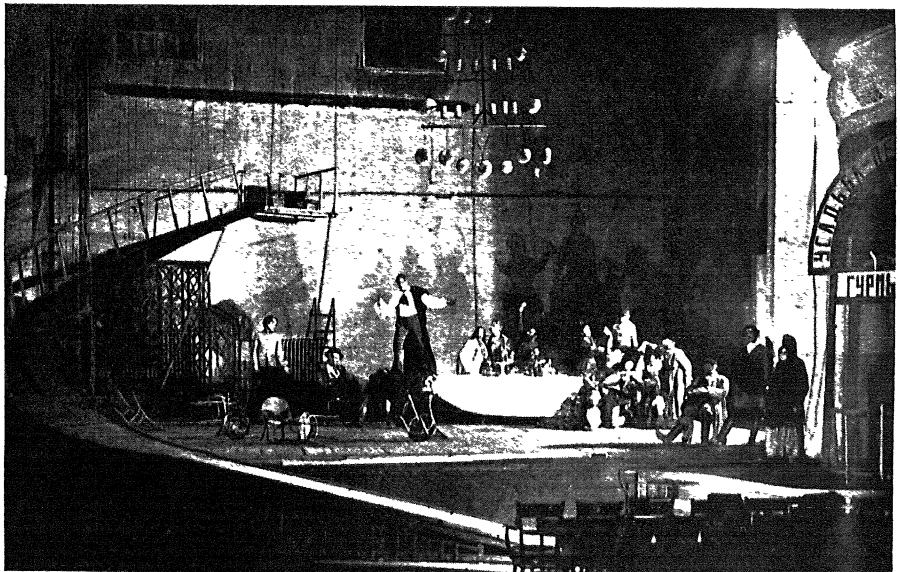
Out of Selvinsky's *Army Commander* Meyerhold made a very solemn memorial to the Civil War, and out of Mayakovsky's comedies he made mordant stage " posters."

MEYERHOLD'S INFLUENCE

Meyerhold is gradually building up a theatre saturated with social and philosophic significance. He reads the classics in his own way. He looks at life from his own peculiar angle; words, sounds, the behaviour of the players, the scenery and settings, the furniture, lights and colours, all only serve to express his ideas. It is not, therefore, surprising that his theatre has had so great an influence on the Soviet theatre.

There are two main influences in the life of the Soviet theatre—Meyerhold and the Moscow Art Theatre. Both have their disciples, who understand the principles of their teachers in their own way and alter them accordingly.

In spite of the fundamental differences between these two great theatres, they have to a certain extent influenced each other. This can



MEYERHOLD THEATRE.—*The Forest* by A. Ostrovsky. Directed by Meyerhold.

be seen more clearly in the work of their followers than in that of the founders.

The tenets of the Moscow Art Theatre are followed by the Second Moscow Art Theatre, formerly a studio of the mother-theatre, by the Vakhtangov, the rising Zavadsky and Simonov Theatres, and by the two musical theatres directed by Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko.

Meyerhold's influence is most evident in the Moscow Theatre of the Revolution, which he directed for a time, and the Krassnaya Pressnya Theatre directed by one of his pupils, Okhlopkov. The joint influence of the two great contrasting tendencies can be traced in the above theatres, particularly in that of Stanislavsky's pupil, Vakhtangov, whose career was cut short by his premature death.

CHAPTER V

VAKHTANGOV AND HIS DISCIPLES

VAKHTANGOV had produced only a few plays when he died in 1922, before reaching the age of forty.

In *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, *Princess Turandot* and *Hadibuk*, great expressiveness of theatrical form went together with profound inner emotion. In this lay their unique charm. Vakhtangov gave each production a form that was peculiar to it and to it alone. Tairov's æsthetic exquisiteness failed to satisfy him and so did the vague formalism of the "Left" directors.

His standpoint was that only after reaching the hidden, secret heart of human emotions, and only upon the firm foundation of these emotions, could a new and more beautiful theatrical structure be erected.

He regarded a new reading of the plays as of the greatest importance. The old interpretations should be dispensed with, and the

special style of the production should be the result of direct " contact " with the author's personality, with the peculiarities of his style, and the unique quality of his themes.

As a result, every new production created, as it were, a new theatre, with its own special features. Having perfected one production, Vakhtangov immediately passed over to " a new theatre " in the next work. He was practically the only pre-revolutionary director in the transition period who emphasised the necessity for a modern philosophy of life and, in consequence, a new and more striking interpretation of a play.

" PRINCESS TURANDOT "

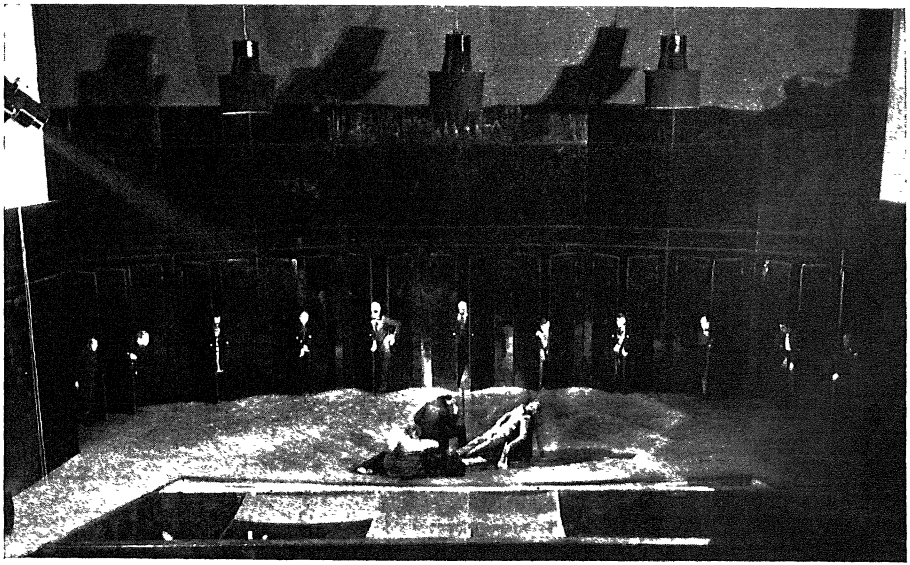
No one of his productions resembled another. *Princess Turandot* was a restoration of a special type of improvisation-theatre. In *Hadibuk*, an old Jewish legend, the dimensions of a mystical tragedy were assumed. Maeterlinck's anti-bourgeois comedy *The Miracle of St. Anthony* became a grotesque satire.

Vakhtangov made some very important improvements in the teaching of Stanislavsky and

Danchenko. He did not actually refute the creative methods of the Moscow Art Theatre, but accepted them only for the sake of the further development of acting-technique. He saw the dangers awaiting the Art Theatre, the exaggeration of "inner-technique" at the expense of the "outer technique." This might very easily plunge it too deeply into the portrayal of isolated psychological emotional experiences, to the detriment of that outward conciseness and clearness without which Vakhtangov found it impossible to imagine the theatre.

That was why he made his actors exhibit in *Princess Turandot* such extreme, almost acrobatic lightness and agility, such harmony, and such an air of impulsive extemporising in their speech. That is why in *Hadibuk*, which was played in Hebrew, he saturated the characters of old ghetto Jews with the most profound emotion, and rendered them typical almost to the point of turning them into masks.

Such was the effect he obtained of the Hebrew tongue, the characteristic gestures, the mournful, terror-stricken eyes. Vakhtangov thought that the greater the depth, the more striking was the expression it demanded, and



MEYERHOLD THEATRE.—*The Inspector General* by Gogol, revised and produced by Meyerhold. Setting by Meyerhold and Dmitriev.

the less it became compatible with the quiet, everyday-ness of the naturalistic theatre.

The strength of his emotions and the keenness of his ideas broke through the old theatrical forms. The pupil who had revised his teacher's doctrines proved himself a daring but intelligent innovator.

After his death his theatre had to think of the development of the principles laid down by him. It was not a question of imitating what he had done, but of understanding and applying his ideas to new problems. The new epoch was very different from the years when Vakhtangov had worked. He had borne the impress of the conflicting experiences of the intelligentsia on their way to accepting the Revolution. There had been no modern dramatist at Vakhtangov's disposal, no important reflections of revolutionary themes in the repertory of classics. His perception of the Revolution had been æsthetic and ethical rather than political. Before he reached the depth of the ideas brought by the Revolution, he was swept away by the stormy beauty of its extent and the moral upheaval it produced in the psychology of a people. The havoc it wrought with the bourgeois code of living and morals attracted him.

Questions of bourgeois family life, which were the subjects of most pre-revolutionary plays, had never interested Vakhtangov, nor did he care for personal relations or the torments of lovers. His acute perception of the Revolution divided his creative work into two streams : rhetorical irony, as in *Princess Turandot*, and exaggerated, almost fantastic tragedy ; and behind both tragedy and irony lay a philosophy that accepted life, the philosophy that led him to the Revolution.

THE USE OF IRONY

Two roads lay before the theatre that inherited his name. It might easily have been carried away by the brilliant success of *Princess Turandot* and have taken the ironic strain in Vakhtangov as the dominating one, particularly since the methods used in *Turandot* were infectious and attractive and always certain of success with the audience.

But the more Vakhtangov's art is studied, the clearer it becomes that this ironic strain was merely a secondary one in Vakhtangov's innermost outlook on life.

To choose between these two tendencies

meant to understand the essence of Vakhtangov's æsthetic views, and the laws upon which his productions were based. The Vakhtangov Theatre did not arrive at an understanding of its teacher all at once. This was not surprising. The ironic methods of *Turandot* had spread over the whole country, and had become one of the most tempting ways of treating a modern production. They were adopted by theatres of entirely opposite tendencies. It was attractive to play skittles with the dividing line between reality and fancy, and to mirror the past in a ridiculous light.

The Vakhtangov Theatre attained brilliant success in this direction, and went almost to the point of abusing the method which for Vakhtangov himself had been only one of many and by no means the chief one.

Light comedies of the type of the old-fashioned *Lev Gourytch Sinitchkin*, the paradoxical comedies of Mérimée, Ostrovsky's pictures of the life of provincial shop-keepers ("Truth is a Good Thing, but Happiness is Better"), all appeared in turn on the stage of Vakhtangov's theatre.

With the development of the country, more serious demands were made by the public. It

was no longer possible to dismiss the culture of the past with a light joke. There was also a demand for modern drama.

For the last few years the Vakhtangov Theatre has been engaged on the study of modern subject-matter and the search for ways of expressing it on the stage. The theatre has not always been successful in this. At times formal conceptions prevailed over the substance of a subject, and the resulting production would appear contradictory and fail to satisfy either the theatre or the audience.

"HAMLET"

The production of *Hamlet* was a case in point. It had, of course, its merits, in so far as the theatre broke away from the idealistic interpretation of Shakespeare's great tragedy. None of the former treatments satisfied this theatre, which realised that the traditional, melancholy *Hamlet* had no place on its stage to-day. Therefore it turned down all the old interpretations and took up a wholly negative attitude, without disclosing the positive foundations of the play. The philosophic side of the tragedy was disregarded and it was interpreted

as no more than the struggle between the heir to a throne and a usurper. The result was a rich, pretentious production, which kept the audience in a state of unabated suspense and enthusiasm, but did not bring it any closer to an understanding of Shakespeare's characters.

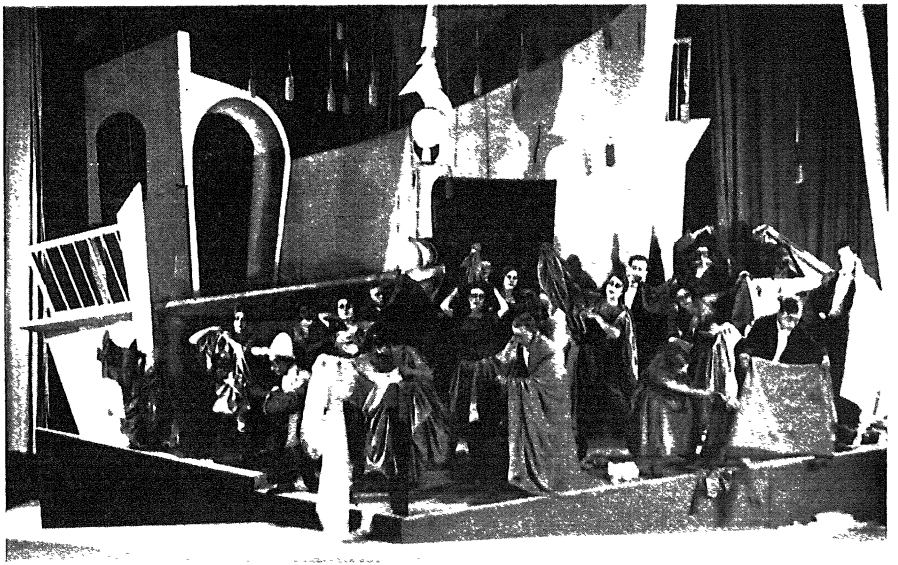
In the new reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the theatre showed the majority of the characters in an ironic light, which the play hardly justified. The irony expressed in *Hamlet* answered neither the requirements of the epoch, nor the cultural level of the audience. It was obvious that the subject for irony had been wrongly chosen. What was suitable for the romantic fairy-tale of *Princess Turandot* was not at all applicable to Shakespeare's philosophic tragedy.

The value of the Vakhtangov Theatre lay in another direction. Its true forte was shown in plays like *A Conspiracy of Sentiments* by Yuri Olesha (1929), *The Badgers* by L. Leonov (1926), *Intervention* by Slavin (1933), and *Egor Bulychev* by Maxim Gorki (1932). Each of these treats of some important modern problem, and each is crowded with living, suffering people, through which the theatre sought to express the essential spirit and features of the epoch.

It did not, however, entirely reproduce the methods of the Moscow Art Theatre, which would have given a finished, detailed study of " inner biographies."

THE PRESENTATION OF CHARACTERS

The Vakhtangov actors usually seize with true insight a few characteristics and features and give these masterly expression. They often heighten and sharpen their favourite characters. They blur some, and overdraw others in keeping with their conception of modern interpretation. The characters are painted in few colours, but these vivid. Outwardly typical features and inwardly significant characteristics are equally emphasised. Great attention is paid to characteristic peculiarities of speech, gait, movements and gesture. In *Intervention*, the action takes place during the French occupation of Odessa. The theatre applies all its great powers of minute observation to show French peculiarities, Odessa traits, the exuberant Southern speech—all the outward show which strikes the audience as so masterly and colourful. The peculiar flavour, the very breath and spirit of the time is conveyed.

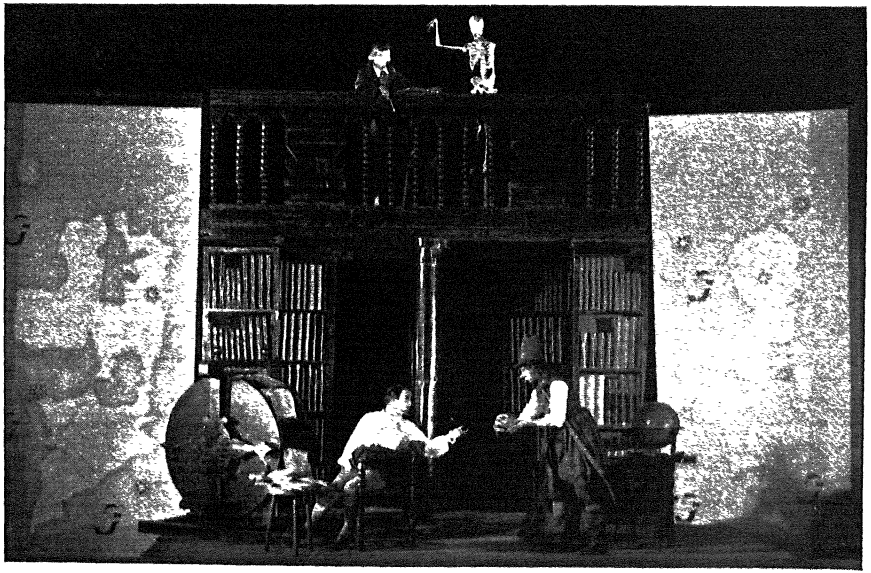


VAKHTANGOV THEATRE.—*Princess Turandot* by K. Gozzi. Produced by Vakhtangov. Setting by I. Nivinsky.

Maxim Gorki's remarkable play *Egor Bulychev* (the first part of a trilogy), was treated in something the same way. The three-act play was divided into episodes, and no effort was spared to restore the atmosphere of pre-revolutionary days. The play describes the eve of the Revolution—a period stretching from December 1916 to February 1917. The theatre introduced the reading of passages from newspapers of the time, and from the speeches of statesmen. The characters in the play recited some of the poems of the symbolist poets, Blok and Zinaida Hippius. The costumes and make-up emphasised the " period." The catastrophe of Tsarist Russia was shown as reflected in the small provincial town where Bulychev had lived all his life. In each of the characters the theatre searched for the psychological and social core typical of Gorki's heroes. The result was a convincing picture of the life and psychology of the times. In its production of this play the Vakhtangov Theatre disclosed its capacity for profound social analysis. The scattered qualities of its former productions have been here united into one great convincing whole.

THE "SHOWMEN" OF THE REVOLUTION

To-day the Vakhtangov Theatre is free from the contradictions that marked the first years of its work. It inherited from its teacher and founder an optimistic philosophy, and this it has developed and placed upon a sound social basis. That is why this theatre is so persistent in its defence of the inner efficacy of the production. That is why the deliberate asceticism of the Art Theatre seems flat to the Vakhtangov Theatre, and the very theatricalness of Meyerhold attractive. But at the same time, the theatre rejects the exaggerated autocracy of the director at the Meyerhold Theatre and believes in the actor's initiative. In my opinion, the Vakhtangov Theatre possesses great inner vitality and energy, an untiring inventiveness, a desire to see things in a new light. It moves to the rhythm of the times. The people of the Vakhtangov Theatre have sharp eyes. No matter what road they may take, they are least of all pedantic. They remember the old maxim —that every kind of art is good, except the dull. They are careful to preserve the freshness of perception that allows them to see people and events clearly, without pre-conceived notions



VAKHTANGOV THEATRE. —*Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 3. Produced and designed by N. P. Akimov.

and without hackneyed formalisms. In a sense, they may be described as splendid modern "showmen." They are psychologically truthful, but never for a moment forget the theatrical nature of their art. They are constantly returning to the romantic repertory ; Hugo's *Marion Delorme*, Schiller's *Cabal and Love* and Mérimée have been brilliantly produced by them. In a certain sense their contradictory *Hamlet* can be traced to the same sources. Hating the pedantic treatment of the school interpretations, the Vakhtangov people preferred rather to accentuate the intrigue and the picturesqueness of the tragedy. This method, unfortunately, did not lend itself to the treatment of *Hamlet.*

They force the audience to look at things as freshly as they do themselves. That is why this theatre remains one of the favourites and its influence has spread among the smaller theatres of the capital and of the provinces. Vakhtangov's young pupils are spreading his teachings, which have also been taken up by the theatres of other nationalities in the Union.

New "theatre-studios" have sprung up in Moscow, directed by two of Vakhtangov's pupils—Y. A. Zavadsky and R. N. Simonov. Kaverin, the director of what was formerly

a studio of the Maly Theatre and is now the "New State Theatre," combines the principles of the Maly, that is, of the realistic, dramatic theatre, with those of the Vakhtangov. The result is an original and extremely interesting theatre. Each of these three directors interprets modern life and revises the classics in his own way. Particularly interesting in this respect are the productions of Ostrovsky's *Talent and its Admirers* at the Simonov Theatre, and *The Guilt of the Innocent* at the New. The peculiar atmosphere of the times is excellently conveyed. Zavadsky's production of Shaw's *Devil's Disciple* is a daring, ironic piece of work and shows an excellent understanding of the author.

CHAPTER VI

THE KAMERNY THEATRE

TAIROV'S SLOGAN when he founded the Kamerny Theatre in 1914 was "the theatralisation of the theatre," a slogan easily to be accounted for by the prevalent vogue for the naturalistic theatre of everyday life.

Tairov's entire repertory was a protest against the linking up of the theatre with reality. He looked upon the stage as a field for conventional acting that had nothing whatever to do with real life and naturalistic imitation, acting that led into a world of extraordinary people and exquisite feelings.

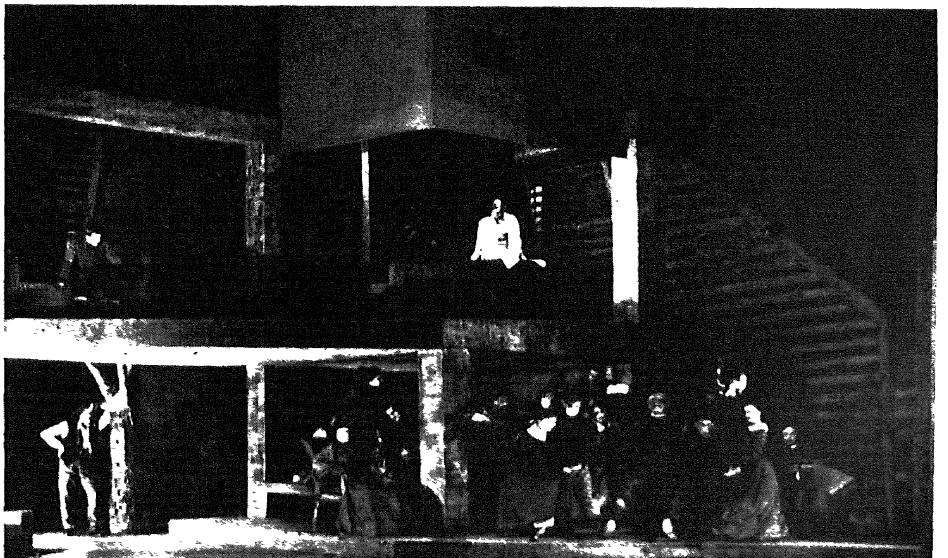
Kalidasa, Beaumarchais, Calderon, Shakespeare and Rostand were produced by him. The theatre was mainly dependent upon the classic drama which had used bright, pure colours and worked on a grand scale. During the years of reaction and pessimism he opened to the audience a sphere of abstract beauty. In accordance with its explicit intentions, the theatre strove to achieve external beauty on

the stage, musical speech and a plastic harmony of movement. The actors danced and sang, rather than acted, their parts. Drama and comedy, pantomime and light opera were equally at home in the repertory of the Kamerny Theatre. It kept to no particular stage form, but pursued its own line in its productions, in which æstheticism was carried to the point of abstraction.

THE CONFLICT WITH REALISM

When, after the Revolution, theatre art was faced with the necessity for ideological enrichment, it became impossible for Tairov to retain his former standpoint, nor could an artist of his principles accept the tendency for representations of real life, then popular on the Soviet stage. He found himself in no man's land. The need for new points of support and for a revision of his methods was for him even more urgent than for the other theatre-directors.

The trouble lay not only in the indifference of the audience to Tairov's problems, but in the fact that he had naturally come to the end of his chosen path. In the 1920's the methods of



KAMERNY THEATRE.—*Desire Under the Elms* by Eugene O'Neill. Produced by Tairov. Setting by V. G. Stenberg.

" theatralising " the theatre had revealed the contradictions contained in them. Tairov was faced with the danger of producing soulless actors and meaningless plays, since he looked upon the actor's creative work as the product of external methods, and upon the play as a mere linear pattern or graph. The subject and the philosophic idea underlying the piece had been sacrificed to melodious speech, impulse, rhythm, movement, striking decorations, and the artificial breaking-up of the acting-platform. The theatre was beginning to repeat itself. The dramatist was merely a hindrance to Tairov's formal ideas. He dreamed of getting rid of the author entirely.

There he stood, then, faced with the necessity of recalling the author to the stage, and of climbing down from the abstract heights to which he had attained.

THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

The way out most acceptable to him was supplied by the plays of Eugene O'Neill. Beginning with *The Hairy Ape* and thence by way of *Desire Under the Elms* to *All God's Chillun Got Wings,* Tairov groped for new paths in his

creative art. Without relapsing into naturalism, but gradually giving up his abstract and, to tell the truth, slightly worn constructions, Tairov is now attempting a concentrated representation of human relations. O'Neill's conciseness of characterisation, the tenseness of his language, and broad, undetailed treatment of his characters, appealed to Tairov, who seems to prefer the stage signs of emotions to the emotions themselves. He is fond of symbolic suggestions calculated to arouse a wealth of emotions in the audience. He is interested in the basic phenomena of the soul which form the subject of his productions—greed, jealousy, race-feeling, love, death in the circumstances created by Western civilisation, and the collapse of that civilisation. Herein lies the link, as it were, between Tairov and our times. He looks at the world of the man of property with the eyes of an accuser. A horrifying picture of the tragedy of property owning is given in *Desire Under the Elms*, the story of Abby Cabot, the murderess of her own child. Tairov shows us the life of the farmers in a few vigorous strokes of the brush. In the economy of stage-expressiveness, the completeness of the characterisation, and the finality of gestures and

movements, the production is reminiscent of classical tragedy.

Tairov is drawn to tragic philosophy and austerity in theatrical form. He has given up æsthetic embellishments, and can no longer accept cruder forms of constructivism. He has turned to severity of form and impressive monumental *mise-en-scènes*. He once loved flamboyant colour ; now he prefers a severe monochrome. He had trained his actors to broken rhythm of movement, to singing and a declamatory style of delivery. Now he seeks economy of gesture and an ascetic clearness of diction.

Tairov, the rationalist, sees life not in its growth, not in its " becoming," but in its results. He is not among those artists who picture present reality, watch its development and observe its gradually changing face.

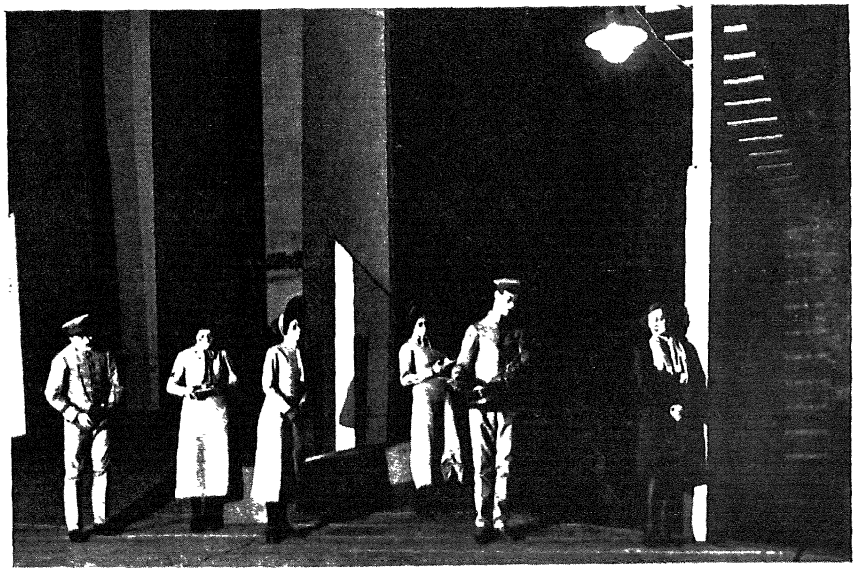
His theatre goes its own way. He has not found one Soviet playwright suitable to the style of the theatre and to the formal peculiarities of his productions. That does not mean that he is not looking for playwrights. On the contrary, he is persistent in his attempts to urge the dramatist along the path of experimental research.

In *The Unknown Soldiers* and *The Pathetic*

Sonata, Tairov tried to evolve a special form of stage-poem which would raise the subject above the usual level of Civil War plays.

"STANDARDISED" TYPES

Tairov thinks in generalisations. He rejects the detail of the psychological drama, the heaviness of everyday life, and the nakedness of the poster. Of Miss Treadwell's play *Machinal*, Tairov makes a general expression of soulless, mechanical life in America. He noted the cruelty of the standardised life, and this fundamental observation determined the nature of the production. He took for his subject the "standardisation" of personal relations, love, debts, employment. His actors play generalised types, representing the essence underlying them, rather than real people. Tairov has cleared the stage of everything superfluous or accidental. He loves straight lines and clear-cut movements. He makes the audience think and visualise in general terms. He is not so much interested in showing us the room of the engineer in all its detail, as the room of an engineer, with a minimum of characteristic features; not so much a street



KAMERNY THEATRE.– *The Negro* by Eugene O'Neill. Produced by Tairov. Setting by V. G. Stenberg.

as any American street. The same applies to the actors. Tairov is against detailed characterisation ; it does not interest him. It seems to him untheatrical, with its weight of realistic detail.

He dreams of severely-planned productions, within the boundaries of which the real heart of the play will be revealed beating with an iron rhythm. In the actor he wants to emphasise the element of will. He sees few colours, but those vivid—a concentrator, but one who is active. He sees the meaning of life and of the epoch laid bare by the logic of artistic thought. He would like the audience to see a generalised expression of great epochs on the stage. He has reached perfection in his technique. O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and Racine's *Phèdre* are brilliant examples of the power and perfection of his stage logic.

Tairov's persistent efforts to discover a closer approach to the questions of to-day were crowned with success. His latest production—Vishnevsky's *Optimistic Tragedy*—opens vast possibilities to the Kamerny Theatre. Tairov has by no means given up his own artistic methods, or hidden his creative powers. He has conceived the Civil War—the subject of Vishnevsky's play—as an heroic poem, and it is in

this light that he has presented the events of the not too distant past. There is a fine rhythmic precision, a splendid restraint in the actor's performance, a virile expressiveness in the settings. But Tairov subordinated all his inventiveness to the main idea of the play. A detachment of anarchistic sailors appears as if out of the mists, and is forged into an organised, disciplined body of bolsheviks in the course of the Civil War. The production has justified its name. The tragic end of the detachment is imbued with such real heroism, and the description of it is full of such human strength and dignity that this ruin ends not on a note of despair, but of faith and confirmation of the ideas of the Socialist Revolution.

CHAPTER VII

OTHER SOVIET THEATRES

THE CREATIVE experience of the leading Soviet theatres affected the others. While feeling the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre, the Meyerhold and the Vakhtangov, others are trying to find a place of their own. The fierce battle of the various theatrical systems did not remain fruitless. It helped to hammer out a number of principles common to all the Soviet theatres, although carried out by each in its own particular way.

The dispute with the formalists, who contemplated a merely external reconstruction in the technique of the production and of acting, ended in their defeat. It became clear to everyone that all the various stage methods were only a means of conveying the idea of the play ; that even the most exquisite, æsthetic conception of a producer was fated to sterility if it merely aimed at beautifying and nothing else. It became evident that the audience would soon turn away in indifference from the empty and

tiresome movements of the actors. Many a producer who had come out in the early years of the Revolution with no other intention but to revolutionise form is to-day utterly out-of-date and uninteresting.

COMMON PRINCIPLES IN THE SOVIET THEATRE

The criticism of the traditional theatre remained valid. Narrow naturalism, reproduction of every-day life as an end in itself, routine methods of acting and the non-political attitude of the theatre have gone, never, it may be supposed, to return. Among the achievements of the revolutionary years of " storm and stress " there are a number of ideas won and shared by every advanced theatrical group in the country.

Every production is a unified whole which expresses the idea of the play, and is organised formally not only in the technical sense, but also with regard to its central inner idea by the craftsmanship and capability of the producer. This idea is always of a philosophic and social nature. Even the more traditional of the theatres, as for instance the century-old Moscow Maly and the Leningrad Alexandria

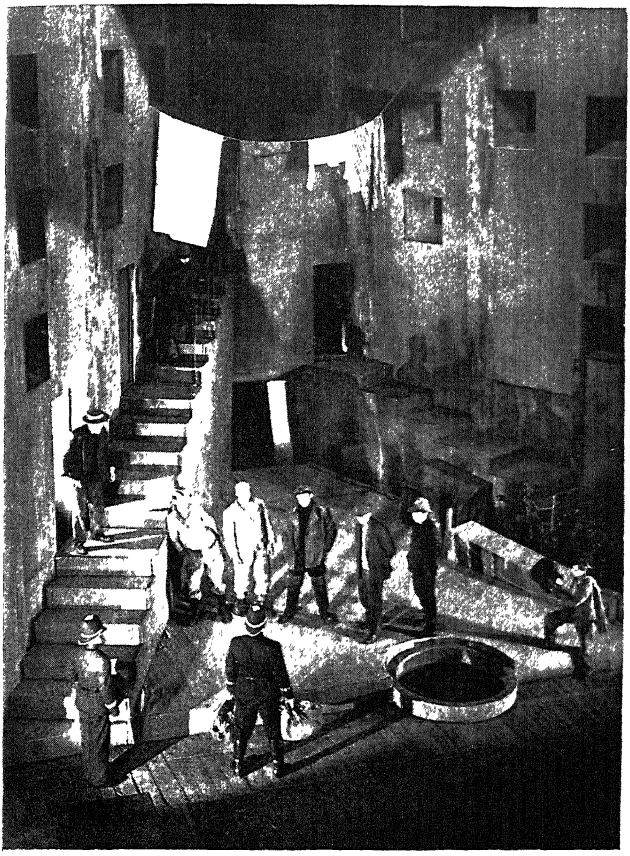
Theatres, accept this. The actor's desire to thrust his own individuality forward, disregarding the *ensemble*, was a well-known feature of these theatres in the past. Not long ago the Maly Theatre produced several plays that showed clearly the new position taken up by the theatre. These were *Lubov Yarovaya*, a play about the Civil War by Trenyev, *Bewilderment Street*, an adaptation of a tale by Gleb Uspensky on the life and manners of a small Russian provincial town about the middle of the 19th century, and *The Enemies*, a play written in 1906 by Maxim Gorki on the subject of the class-struggle between masters and workers. These displayed the theatre's newly acquired ability to give a social analysis of an epoch and to preserve the unity of ideas. The Maly Theatre has by no means given up the principles of its realistic art, but whereas in the past the brilliant efforts of its individual actors did not unite to form a synchronic whole, they are now united in one strong chain that serves to disclose the idea of the play. The actors of this theatre are no longer interested in their rôles for their own sake—no matter how promising these rôles may be—they now want to understand every rôle in the play. They are not

interested in characterisation as a clever trick that can be learned. They are searching for the real and most typical features that signify the social and psychological essence of the character. It is this way of looking upon the performance as an integral social and philosophic production that secures for the entire Soviet theatre its high artistic and social level.

For the sake of expressing the ideas contained in the play, the Soviet theatre makes wide use of auxiliary elements. Painting, architecture, and music are included in the production, as means of affecting the audience. Such elements cannot be used alone, as was formerly the case when the centre of attraction was often the scenery, painted by well-known artists. The whole setting must agree with the idea of the play. There must be nothing superfluous on the stage ; every detail must have its own special purpose and be calculated to produce its effect on the audience.

THE "CONSTRUCTIVIST" TENDENCY

During the war against the naturalistic theatre with its painstaking imitation of life and its stage overloaded with unnecessary detail, the



THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION.—*Joy Street* by Zarkhi, Act III. Produced and set by I. Shlepyanov.

" constructivist " tendency got the upper hand. The " constructivists " regarded the stage merely as a platform for showing off the external technique of the actor. They not only refused to copy life—they rejected all resemblance to life. In their productions—created under Meyerhold's influence—they used zigzag staircases and broken surfaces. They divided the stage not only horizontally, but vertically. They looked upon the stage as a lathe for the actor's work. For instance, in the production of Lobisch's old comedy *The Savingsbox*, the director, Ferdinandov, and the artist Boris Erdman used a sloping stage upon which a minute imitation of the Eiffel Tower, about three times the height of a man, had been built. Upon this construction the actors had to play. It demanded lightness, rhythm and a certain amount of agility.

" Constructivism " in its purest form has been rejected by the theatre. It played its part in freeing the stage on the one hand from naturalism and on the other from an æsthetic preoccupation with painting that turned the theatre into a magnified picture gallery. It emphasised the need for a universal and more elastic use of the stage. It frequently simplified

and schematised the idea of the play. The Soviet theatre has borrowed from constructivism its idea of a convenient acting-platform that would permit of the actor's demonstrating his talent and craftsmanship, and has endeavoured to combine it with realistic elements. The stage should serve to disclose the idea of the play, and not assume a formal and self-important position all its own.

THE MOSCOW KRASSNAYA PRESSNYA THEATRE

This attitude to the play permits of a variety of treatments. The Krassnaya Pressnya Theatre in Moscow (a new theatre working under the direction of Okhlopkov, one of Meyerhold's disciples) made some interesting experiments when adapting for the stage Stavsky's sketches *At a Run.* The scenic version is divided up into a number of episodes. The action takes place on a collective farm and is based on the struggle to join up with the collective farm. The scenes are written in an arresting realistic style and are very typical. The usual personal plot is absent. The young director started out with the idea of making the audience not only witness,

THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION.—*My Friend* by N. Pogodin, Act III. Produced by A. Popov. Setting by I. Shlepyanov.

but take part, as it were, in the life and events of the village. He was determined to draw the spectator as close as possible to the action unfolded in the performance. He therefore resolved to do away with the stage in the usual sense. The performance takes place on a special platform in the very centre of the auditorium. Some of the action takes place upon planks running from the stage through the auditorium. A double row of smaller platforms runs along the walls. The material for the settings, the scenery of the village, fences, gates and other things, are placed on these platforms. Thus the action is spread to the audience, which is directly drawn into the life of the village. The struggle takes place in the midst of the audience and this produces a powerful impression.

The theatres following Meyerhold's example frequently break up plays into short episodes, for greater vigour and expression. Sometimes there are over twenty of these episodes; and in each the producer tries to give, in a few essential telling strokes, the subject of the scene. This is reflected in the technical side of the production. Most of the theatres of the capital and the larger provincial towns use a revolving stage that permits of rapid set changes. The producer

tries to co-ordinate these short scenes externally as well as internally with the idea of the play.

One of the most usual methods is the use of a single acting-platform that remains unaltered throughout the performance, but allows of a change in details. The structure of the stage conveys the idea of the play, while the changing details give the subject of each separate scene. In the majority of cases these details are basically realistic. They serve to emphasise this or that feature of the setting to which the artist and the producer wish to draw attention.

THE MOSCOW THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION

Some of the most interesting experiments in this field have been made by Shlepyanov, the artist of the Theatre of the Revolution in Moscow, and Akimov of the Leningrad Dramatic Theatre. The Theatre of the Revolution has attempted to synthesise the main currents of the Soviet theatre. Alexei Popov, the director, who was formerly a pupil at the Moscow Art Theatre, is obviously influenced

by Vakhtangov and Meyerhold. He uses the principles of a purified constructivism but rejects all psychological aloofness on the part of the actor and demands a clear-cut characterisation. At the same time he lays particular stress on the importance of modern subject-matter for the stage. With the exception of two or three, all the plays produced by this theatre have been those of modern Soviet and Western dramatists. The Theatre of the Revolution has played a big part in the development of the Soviet stage. It has never wavered in its social and artistic position. The task it set itself was to give a social idea to a play, to raise it above the level of a single incident to a general problem. The acting and the outward form of the production converge towards the fulfilment of this aim.

In Zarkhi's play, *Joy Street*, Shlepyanov provides a general background of a yard shut in by tall houses of the standardised town type. The play deals with the life of poor people in a capitalist town. The background remains the same throughout. The tall, gloomy houses give an impression of the dreary monotony of poverty. As a contrast to this, the action of Pogodin's play *My Friend* takes place against a

broad cheerful background that creates an atmosphere of spaciousness, of construction on a vast scale, of a life of active energy.

THE LENINGRAD DRAMATIC THEATRE

For the production of *Robespierre* at the Leningrad Dramatic Theatre, Akimov used the methods of the cinema. He constructed a portal and a flight of silver steps leading from the front of the stage to the orchestra. This emphasised the tragic idea underlying the play. Glimpses of old Paris formed the background. These glimpses were shown in a conventional way ; the sharp gable of a house, the silhouette of a column, a street lamp-post—impressions of an old town pregnant with tragedy.

The form of the play is merely the expression of its ideas. Akimov sometimes exaggerates the importance of the artist and usurps the rights of the producer. On the other hand, in an earlier production of his at the Vakhtangov Theatre, Akimov consciously subordinated his fantasy to the general idea of the play. This is how the producers defined their problem in a few sentences: The main idea of the play is

contained in its title *The Fissure*. The existing order of society is broken up and a new stratification of classes takes place. Family life is broken up and a new grouping takes place—here, too, some members of the family siding with the revolution and some against. In order to show the break-up of the family and the change in each of its members as part of a great social catastrophe, it is necessary, in the first place, to create a special background of turmoil, in the form of mass demonstrations. Only then will the separate, human tragedy be seen in the right perspective. This will emphasise its intimate, personal character against the background of events. Secondly, all the family and personal scenes must be compressed, in setting and scenery, into small, separate inserts, representing a corner of a dining-room or of a vestibule, or simply a window. In order to free the settings from realistic detail and to avoid over-burdening the stage, all the action taking place in the home should be given in separate small inserts.

STAGE SETTING AND THE RÔLE OF THE ACTOR

This is typical of the way in which the Soviet theatre understands stage setting. It extends the scope of the play into the domain of vast ideas. No effort, no treatment or method is neglected that helps bring home to the spectator the idea of the play. The theatre creates the necessary " stage atmosphere " around the *dramatis personæ.* The musical fragments stress the necessary mood. The colours of the settings and the lighting help to evoke sensations of alarm or courage, pleasure or grief, as the case may be.

The actor's art acquires a still greater significance. The external technique of the actor cannot be separated from the internal. Rhythm and musical harmony are his principal requirements. Clear delivery, precise movements, complete control over his body, and the ability to subordinate it to its task—these are all qualities equally necessary for actors of every school. All these, however, are only a means for conveying the essence of the character seen by the observant eye of the modern artist. The actor divines the inner movement of the

character he is playing and establishes his own attitude to it. To be able to do this he must have an intimate knowledge of life, the new outlook which has arisen in society, the new types of people bred and brought into prominence by the Revolution.

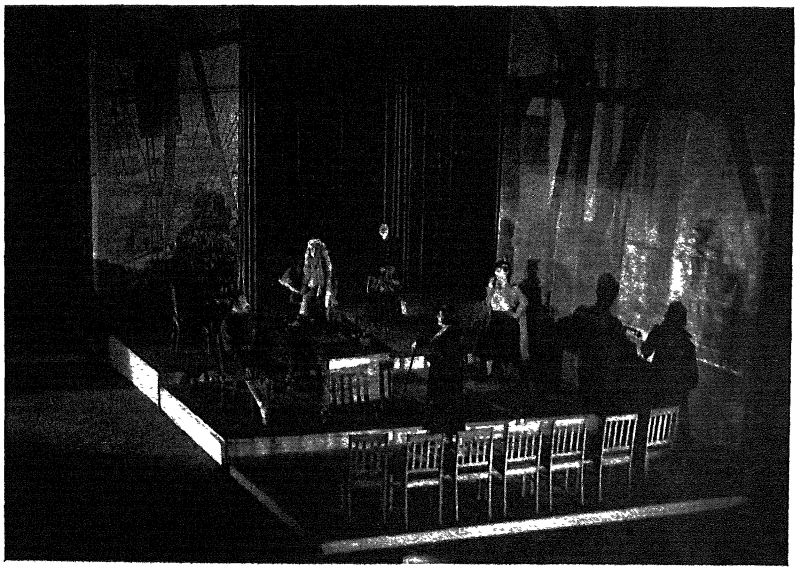
It is only natural that the art of acting should have branched at first in two directions. The "formalists," of whom we have already spoken, stressed the need for freeing the actor from the bonds of realism or æstheticism. The realists held that the actor needed a still closer link with life; it was his duty to steep himself in the turbulent, enriching atmosphere of the Revolution. Unquestionably the actor was born again during those stormy revolutionary years. From a professional interested in nothing but his own particular art, he has become a citizen who feels himself closely linked with the life of his country and responsible to the new audience for its political and cultural growth.

The "formalists" suffered a complete defeat. Their unreserved emphasis on external technique was rejected. Neither the restoration of the Italian *commedia dell'arte,* nor the methods of the travelling street-theatres were to become the foundations for Soviet acting. Nevertheless,

the influence of the formalists was indicative of the need for complete mastery of the technical side of production.

THE NEW TYPES REQUIRED BY THE REVOLUTION

The stage was swept by the waves of modern life. New types of characters have invaded the theatre, and presented the actor with difficult problems. The variety and wealth of new types may be gauged from the work of the Moscow Trades Unions' Council Theatre. In direct opposition to the Meyerhold and the Theatre of the Revolution, this theatre from the very first devoted itself to reproducing current life. Untroubled at first by great problems of form, it concerned itself exclusively with the description of the Civil War and socialist construction. Its work during the years 1926–29 gained it recognition, for it introduced an entirely new selection of types to the stage. This roused controversy, since the theatre seemed limited to a collection of original material, and seemed destined never to rise to great philosophic generalisations. Its example was infectious, however, for it seemed to breathe the emotions



THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION.—*My Friend* by N. Pogodin, Act III. Produced by A. Popov. Setting by I. Shlepyanov.

and experiences of those who took part in the Civil War. It was criticised for these emotions and experiences, which were not expressed in an impressive form. It was only later, during the years 1930 to 1933, that this element became more prominent, in proportion to the theatre's development and maturity.

Its activity was, nevertheless, important. Its vital, sometimes chaotic material was always powerful in effect. It presented the material to the audience with the simplicity and clarity of a witness of the years gone by. It told the story of the Revolution plainly and epically, preaching hatred of the enemy and the defence of the republic. The bold directness of the acting reached the audience, which sensed the optimism and belief in the final victory of the Revolution ; and if the spectator did not find in this theatre the complete characterisation of the heroes of our day, nevertheless, individual features were taken hold of and dynamically represented. The spectator caught at these presentations greedily. The more simple the theatre's outlook on the times, the more perfect its expression of the suffering, death, heroism and joy arising out of the ruthless revolutionary struggle. The theatre looked upon the life

around it, and tried to speak with the voice of that life. It felt the beauty of the helmets and overcoats of the Red Army, the rhythm of work, and it understood that the tinsel trappings of the old stage had no place in the beauty of this epoch.

The formerly scattered, broken pattern has been gathered into one great whole by the Soviet actor. Space will not allow of our dwelling on the various individual players. The Revolution has brought forward a whole galaxy of young actors, and the theatres largely depend on those actors who have grown up during the last sixteen years. There are quite a number of theatres that consist entirely of these young players. The older generation of master-craftsmen devote their best efforts and profound knowledge of their art to the interpretation of the classics and of modern plays.

The art of acting is distinguished by a clear, direct view on life. It has been cleansed of all tinsel and bombast. Simplicity demands supreme craftsmanship. The Soviet actor is working to attain this simplicity, mastery and depth.

CHAPTER VIII

SOVIET OPERA AND BALLET

THE OVERHAULING of the old theatre did not stop at drama. It extended to the opera and the ballet. These two forms are, however, more backward in this respect than the drama proper. It was extremely difficult to solve the problem of bringing such strictly conventional forms up-to-date. The first attempts at modernising old operas ended, naturally enough, in failure. However praiseworthy the aims underlying the attempts to supply new subjects for the old music of Meyerbeer or Glinka, it was in fact a form of artistic opportunism—of adapting old material to the need of the moment. They were never admitted to the stages of the leading theatres, but appeared from time to time in the provinces. Although the great opera-houses took up a severely critical attitude to the stage and tried to rid themselves of the burden of banalities, the past weighed heavily on them. The problem could not be solved by mere outward alterations—

the introduction of magnificent scenery or clever constructivism. It was a question of a radical change in the whole idea of the opera performance. The problem was taken up by the new Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko studios and the State Opera houses of Leningrad.

THE STANISLAVSKY STUDIO

Although both the above-mentioned studios traced their origin to the Moscow Art Theatre, their ways diverged. Stanislavsky devoted himself to training opera-actors, while Nemirovitch-Danchenko was all for daring experiments. To Stanislavsky, the chief problem was the psychological justification of the operatic form. When this form coincided with the composer's style, Stanislavsky obtained excellent results. His production of *Eugène Onegin* has never been excelled for the depth and simplicity with which it expressed Pushkin and Tchaikovsky. It is in this production that the methods and theories of Stanislavsky have found their best expression. His object was to introduce real men and women to the operatic stage. All the things he had combated in his early years,

and which he had succeeded in driving from the dramatic theatre, still prevailed on the opera stage. An opera continued to be treated as a concert. *Cliché* continued to predominate in the affectations of the leading opera singers, in the neglect of the psychological content of the characters, in the cult of "sound for sound's sake."

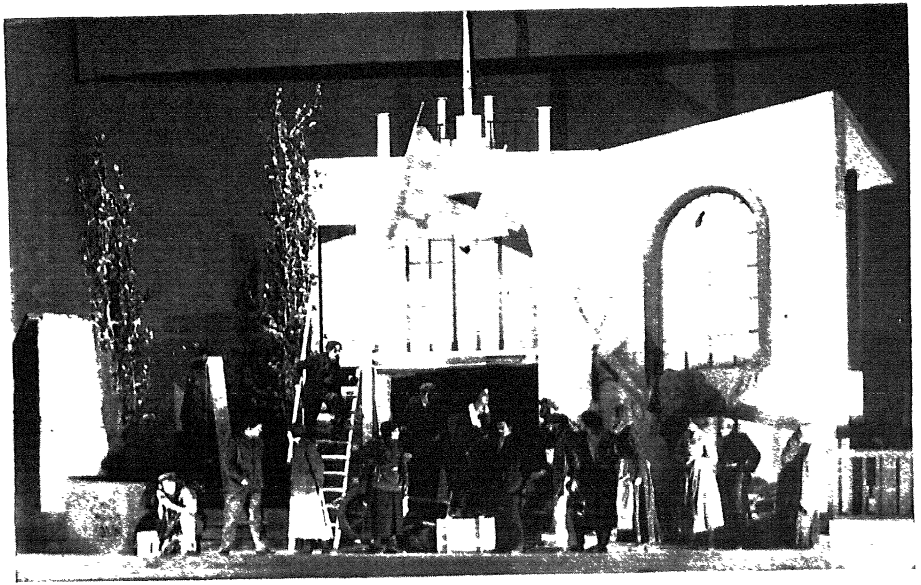
Stanislavsky worked long and persistently at the psychological vindication of operatic action, of "part" acting, and at training the singing actor whose voice would be the expression of the inner unity of his part. Carried away by the idea of an actor-singer, Stanislavsky neglected the outward form of the opera, or rather, merely introduced the methods of the Art Theatre. They helped him to obtain naturalness, simplicity and an *ensemble* that combined the rather isolated opera-singers in one harmonious whole, imbuing them with a common understanding of the production and making it possible for them to live a plausible stage life.

THE NEMIROVITCH-DANCHENKO STUDIO

Nemirovitch-Danchenko was even more thoroughgoing. He not merely aimed at the reform of the opera, but strove to create a new species of musical production. He began, like Stanislavsky, by training actors. The fact that both founders of the Art Theatre turned their energies to opera was not at all accidental, but was rather dictated by the necessity for testing the methods established in the spoken drama in their application to neighbouring forms.

This test aided both directors to make certain revisions in their conception of the actor. Certain elements that had formerly been neglected in the actor's art were now given their true importance. Rhythm was recognised as one of the main laws of the stage.

Along with the training of the new actor, Nemirovitch-Danchenko conceived the idea of a synthetic stage. He introduced the formula " singing-actor." Nemirovitch-Danchenko had in his mind's eye the perfect actor whose voice, movements and rhythmic acting would express the inner essence of the rôle he played. Singing



MALY THEATRE.—*Lubov Yarovaya* by K. Trenev, Act IV.

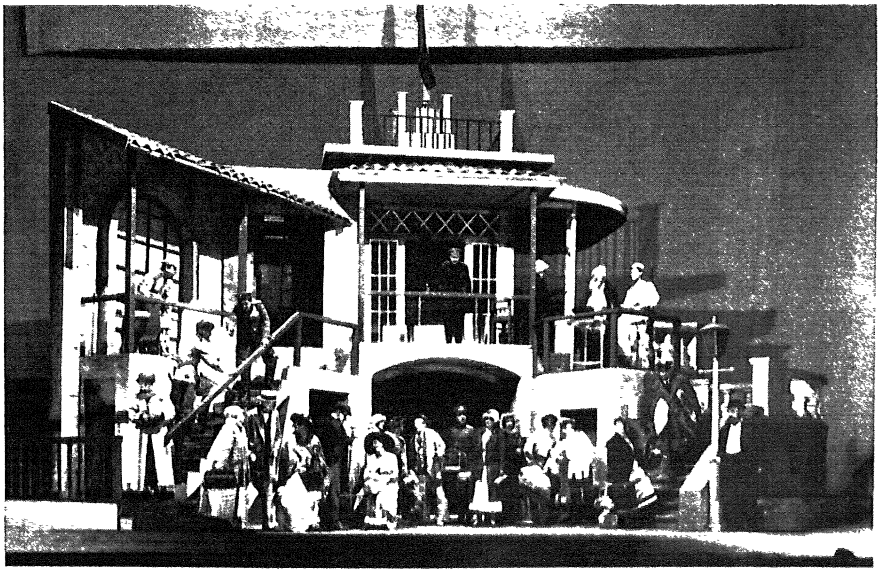
would thus still be of prime value, but cease to be an end in itself. Nemirovitch-Danchenko began with musical comedy, and then included in his repertory plays set to music, classic opera and modern Western music. Each production was a departure from the hackneyed conception of opera. In each case the modern dramatic stage was the example followed. The following list of his productions will give some idea of his scope. Although only fourteen years old, the Nemirovitch-Danchenko Musical Theatre has produced Lecoque's *La Fille de Madame Angot*, Offenbach's *Pericolla*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (music by Glier), Kshennik's *Jonny*, Knipper's *North Wind*, Planquette's *Les Cloches de Corneville* and Moussorgsky's *Sorochinsk Fair*.

The main principle followed in production is to bring out the idea contained in the music by every means at the theatre's disposal. Not only must the actor be musical, but the scenery, the architecture of the stage and the costumes should be designed to fit in with the tonal rhythm.

In producing *Carmen* Nemirovitch-Danchenko discarded the old libretto of Meilhac and Halavy, since it obscured the real

sources of the opera by a false and operatic picture of Spain. The Spain that Nemirovitch-Danchenko saw was not the picturesque country of toreadors and castanets, but the cruel terrifying Spain that looks out of the pictures of Zuloaga and Goya. He saw the eternal, tragic struggle between the sexes. He decided the question of the chorus in a way applicable to other operatic productions. In his treatment the usual dull crowd of "supers" became something approaching the antique chorus. Groups of Spanish women were placed on platforms overlooking the stage, where the tragedy of Carmen and José is enacted. The chorus was, as it were, removed from the stage action, and entrusted with the rôle of author and observer. In *Lysistrata*, on the contrary, the chorus became the principal *dramatis personæ*. Disgusted with the falseness and psychological improbability of the typical opera-libretto, Nemirovitch-Danchenko always produces a new text which keeps closely to the original and brings out the subject matter of the music with much greater truth.

The production of the famous light opera *Les Cloches de Corneville* is the work of Mordvinov. His attitude to Planquette's music was



MALY THEATRE. *Evacuation of the White Guards* by K. Trenev, Act IV. Produced by I. S. Platon and L. M. Prozorovsky.

strictly critical. He used only the passages that had real value. The rest, no matter how popular, were ruthlessly scrapped, and replaced by other Planquette compositions, supplemented by a few things written by Mossalov in the same style.

Dissatisfied with the old plot, the theatre decided to create a new one. The central plot was to be the story of a gay troupe of travelling actors who arrive at the old castle of Corneville and expose the Abbé. This became the main thread of a light musical production, filled with many amusing episodes. The efforts of the theatre were directed to the creation of a modern Soviet production, no matter what the subject, and no matter whether the repertory be classic or modern.

"SOCIALIST REALISM" IN SOVIET OPERA

The difficulty in the creation of a Soviet opera is to avoid turning the characters which are so familiar to us into conventional opera figures, and to find a justification for the actor's unexpectedly bursting out into song.

In this respect *Katerina Ismailova*, by Shostakovitch, is a continuation of the line marked

out by the musical production *North Wind*, by Knipper—one of the very few operas with a modern subject. The latter was supplied by Kirschon's play *The City of High Winds*, the story of the execution of the twenty-six commissars of Baku. Kirschon's play is not photographic or historical. It raises the episode of the Baku commissars to romantic, philosophic heights, and enables the audience to understand and appraise the heroism of those days in a new way.

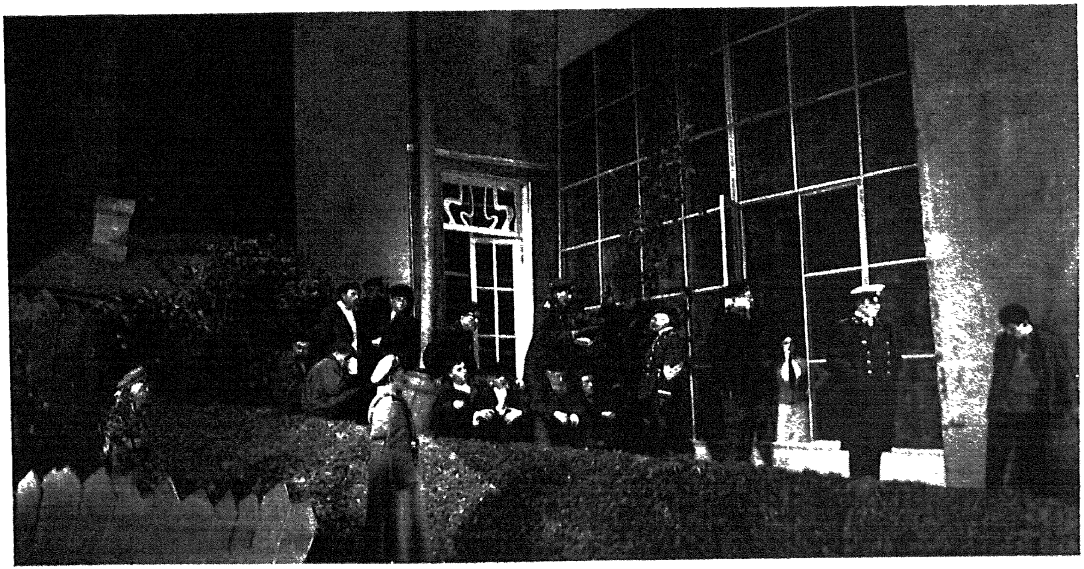
Katerina Ismailova was written by the young composer, Shostakovitch, in 1933. The composer who looks upon the past with the eyes of a builder of socialist society is no less important than the composer writing on a modern subject. Shostakovitch's opera is the biggest landmark in the development of the opera. The dramatic intensity of the subject itself—it is adapted from a story by Leskov—is combined with a music full of profound psychological meaning and that simplicity which clothes the real essence in art. Tsarist Russia is conjured up before us with all the force of realism. Shostakovitch points the way to creative work under the slogan of " Socialist realism." His work is characteristic not only of the opera, but of the

entire Soviet theatre. It bears witness to the upward movement of theatrical art, which is drawing in its train even the more conservative forms of art to new and splendid tasks.

CHAPTER IX

NEW TENDENCIES AND FORMS

MEYERHOLD, the leader of the "October Revolution in the Theatre," roused opposition both right and left. The "right" opposition is easily explained. It stood for the defence of the traditional theatre which Meyerhold was out to destroy. The "lefts" regarded Meyerhold as too moderate. In spite of his enmity to the existing traditional theatre, Meyerhold remained within the bounds of theatre art. Many of the "lefts" claimed that art should merge with life. The death of the theatre was near at hand, they prophesied, and the only course was to desert it for some more vital and passionate form. The battle against the theatre "in general," the attempt to destroy it, was not crowned with success. The theatre did not die. It underwent startling changes, sometimes slow and profound, sometimes passionate, sometimes concentrated. The theatre sought novelty in Meyerhold's suggestions, in new acrobatic tricks, in immoderate doses of eccentricity, while the revolutionary days gave it new wealth



MALY THEATRE. — *Enemies* by Maxim Gorky, Act III, Scene 2. Produced by K. P. Khokhlov. Setting by M. S. Levin.

of wisdom and experience. The enemies of the theatre accepted it as a temporary, transitional form, leading to the more complicated forms dictated by the historical situation. They accorded the producer the position of Master-of-Ceremonies of life; they regarded the theatre as a suitable place for the training of an ideal man (" the actor must be transformed into a skilled worker "), and held that the theatre " should provide examples of life and models of people." Since the specific artistic nature of the theatre was denied, this theory produced no serious artistic results. Hating " the falseness of art " and professing a preference for real, warm life, they compromised for the time being with " the poster theatre, the theatre of challenge and awakening, which would organise social consciousness." They perceived, however, other and more tempting pictures that drew them away from the theatre —" meetings, banquets, the tribunal, the auditorium, club evenings, processions, carnivals, parades, demonstrations, funerals, election-campaigns, strikes, factory scenes." The inner contradictoriness of this attitude was obvious. To be consistent meant to sever all connection with the theatre in its usual forms.

"MASS ACTION" SPECTACLES

The soundest attempts were those to organise "mass action"—a new and original form of art. This was characteristic of the epoch of war-time communism. It was best represented in Leningrad. Mass action arose out of the desire to draw in the greatest number of people to take part in the performance, and to create a monumental production. Its idea was collective, creative art. It spread beyond the walls of the theatre, and was transferred to the streets, where the action went on in the open air. The spectator was no longer an indifferent onlooker, but became, as it were, one of the actors in the vast performances that were given on revolutionary holidays, or days commemorating the years of struggle, risings and revolutions. The subject of these "mass plays" ranged from the symbolic—which were to represent on a monumental, generalised scale the victory of the Revolution, and the ruin of capital—to the historical—such as the taking of the Winter Palace.

The mass-plays symbolising labour and capital were arranged on a vast scale. They had their origin in the festivals of the great

French Revolution. Such was the First of May festival of the "Liberation of Labour," directed by Annenkov and Kugel in Leningrad; the artists responsible were Dobuzhinsky, Annenkov and Shchuko.

"The façade of the Stock Exchange is utilised. Over its columns a canvas representing the Fortress of Fanfares is stretched. Lines of people dressed in grey approach the flight of steps. They are slaves. Higher up, in front of the columns, their lords and masters sit feasting at great tables. They are Napoleon, the Sultan and the Pope. The slaves rush up the steps, but the servants of the high personages drive them back. The same thing happens for the second time. The third time the slaves approach armed with red flags. The banqueting lords disappear. The canvas imitation of the fortress falls to the ground and reveals a second canvas with a picture of the Tree of Liberty. The released slaves dance. Then follows a firework display."

These plays spread over a vast area, and were soon taken part in by cavalry, artillery and infantry. Armoured cars, even warships and torpedo-boats were introduced, and the whole affair gradually lost its symbolic

character, and became a panoramic illustration of historic events. The taking of the Winter Palace was one of the largest mass productions of the second class. The directors were Yevreinov, Kugel and Petrov. The artist was Annenkov. Over 6,000 persons took part in it. The events directly preceding the November Revolution formed the subject, which included the appearance of General Kornilov, of the shock-troops, and Kerensky. The final act was the attack and seizure of the Winter Palace.

The admission of elements external to the theatre was a method employed and popularised by Meyerhold. In the case of the mass-plays, this feature largely contributed to the impressive effect. The attempt to draw in the masses to these entertainments brought up the question of the actor of the non-professional theatre as an ideal participator in public mass-plays, as one devoid of the elementary failings of his professional brother.

LENINGRAD DRAMATIC THEATRE.—*Robespierre* by F. Raskolnikoff. Produced by N. P. Akimov.

THE NON-PROFESSIONAL THEATRICAL CIRCLES

The theatre was conceived as a medium for the education of an ideal person. The country had never been attacked by such violent theatre-fever as during the first years of the Revolution. Every district, every army unit, every factory had its own "theatre-circle," watched over and developed with the greatest care and attention. These circles attracted workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers and employees. They produced short plays and sketches. It would not be correct to compare this non-professional art with the "amateur theatricals" arranged for the amusement of society in the old days. The modern non-professional theatre-circle worked under the superintendence of an experienced trainer. A great deal of attention was paid to the general development of the individual members. Every production added something to their political or artistic education. The aim of the theatre-circles was not merely amusement, but the education of the socialist citizen. It aimed at raising him to the high intellectual level of the epoch, of awakening in him the necessary

political consciousness, and giving him a comprehension of art and a healthy, well-developed body. The theatre became the chief link in the system of art-and-club work. The other club-circles—the music, literary and art-study groups—were often subordinated to it, and did little more than fulfil tasks set them by the theatre. Rhythm, physical culture, exercises calling for attention and concentration, the ability to penetrate to the inner essence of the character, a close acquaintance with art and music—all this tended to raise the general level of culture and develop powers of observation, thus helping the development of future creative artists.

"BLUE BLOUSE" AND "LIVING NEWSPAPER" GROUPS

In addition to their educational work, the circles provide all manner of theatrical performances, from the shortest sketches to important plays. The "Blue Blouse" and the "Living Newspaper" mass-readings and recitals are organised by them for the clubs. The "Blue Blouse" and the "Living Newspaper" are the most finished of the smaller forms. Both of

them give entertainments at the clubs and factories for workers and employees. The repertory of the "Blue Blouse" contains, besides turns, whole scenes from plays, and sometimes attempts at modern operetta and vaudeville. The "Blue Blouse," in acquiring the style of the Soviet music-hall, has not lost all connection with the theatre, but has altered the methods of the latter to suit its own particular purposes. In its insistence on physical culture and the laying bare of artistic technique it is closest of all to the forms established by Meyerhold.

The second type of music-hall work, the "Living Newspaper," maintains a closer contact with the theatre and uses theatrical methods. Unlike the "Blue Blouse," it employs make-up and picturesque costumes, etc. It approaches in form the stage poster and the cartoon. It is made up in the order of a newspaper, including leading articles, *feuilletons*, current events, and so on. Both these forms of entertainment treat of topics of the day, and the local news of the factory or works is reflected in their sketches.

During the early years of the Revolution, current events and agitational trials were

frequently dramatised. For example: "On the 28th of June, 1920, in the Third International Club of Tver, the trial of feudal Poland was held. The workers of Tver pronounced their verdict. The Polish Government, landowners and bourgeoisie were found guilty of a criminal attack on Soviet Russia." . . . The club trains its own playwrights and searches for new methods, showing a preference for agitational and propagandist forms and subjects. The action of these plays is easily transferred from the front to the factory, and from there to the palace and the stock exchange, from 1905 to 1914 and 1915. The characters are typical and permanent, the "bourgeoisie, intellectuals, generals, workers, Red Army Soldiers"—always in new combinations, but with constant unvarying characteristics. The chorus forms the dramatic centre of the performance, and plays an important rôle. The simplest and most frequently employed forms of entertainment included in the programme of the circle are: "couplet-singing, living posters, theatralised games, buffoonery." There is no doubt whatever that the theatrical circles, while coming under the influence of the theatre, have in their turn

LENINGRAD DRAMATIC THEATRE.—*Robespierre* by F. Raskolnikoff. Produced by Akimov.

exercised a certain amount of influence upon theatrical methods. The sharp outlines of the characters and, in particular, the flaring poster style of naturalism was later transferred to the legitimate stage. The Communist Youth productions influenced the Leningrad Red Theatre, the Young Workers' Theatre and the Moscow Trade Union Theatre. The peculiar naturalism of the Red Theatre with its Civil War episodes resembles, in its poster-like dramatic quality and its closeness to life, the productions of the clubs. Meyerhold's use of naturalism for agitational and propaganda purposes and his introduction of elements external to the theatre was after all not quite accidental.

The methods of the mainly non-professional Communist Youth Theatre have been described, by an observer who has made a careful study of it, as follows. He notes that "the characters representing class enemies of the Revolution are always subjected to an exaggerated process of refraction and become senseless, distorted." They are shown in a comical light. "On the other hand, the naturalistic characters of the plays produced by the Communist Youth Theatre were imbued with the

love and affection of a modern man and an artist for the details of the new world arising before his very eyes. This was the naturalism of love, or idyllic naturalism."

Annual inter-union competitions are organised in Moscow and Leningrad, which are intended to raise the standard of the Trade Union Theatre circles. The latter are expected to undertake a prolonged study of acting, based on the requirements of the modern theatre. The methods acquired by study are developed by the production of important plays like *Lubov Yarovaya*, *The Gale*, and *The Mandate*.

THE YOUNG WORKERS' THEATRES

The most perfect type of non-professional theatre is to be found in the Young Workers' theatres which have spread all over the Soviet Union. There are scores of these half-professional theatres and thousands of small circles in factories, and on collective farms.

These theatres have passed through an important evolution. They started out by producing agitational plays, and voiced at first the theory of the " pamphlet " style of

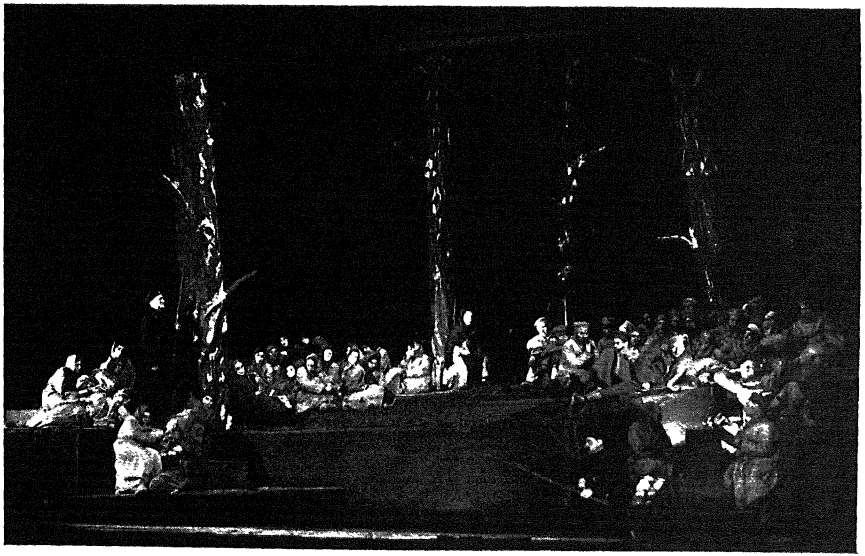
play, with the actor as an "emotional lecturer." They looked upon theatre art as nothing more than a means for agitation and propaganda. In their zeal to be of service to socialist construction, and in their hostility to non-party art, they were ready to scorn the specific nature of dramatic art. They produced a number of plays on important problems of modern life. These theatres worked out some curious methods which greatly assisted in emphasising the political idea of the play. They transferred the action freely from the present to the past for the sake of a more striking exposure of bad characters, typifying people who "adapted" themselves to the Revolution, and in order to emphasise good types. But the more the movement developed, the more pressing became the necessity for uniting political effectiveness with a high level of acting ability. In their recent productions these Young Workers' theatres have concentrated their efforts on the critical assimilation of the principal canons of the actor's art. The Moscow Young Workers' Theatre not very long ago produced Mikitenko's play *Girls of Our Country*. In the production of this play the theatre joined forces with the directors of the

Moscow Art Theatre, a combination which yielded most promising results. The characters of the young people were acted with convincing power and truthful class characterisation.

Despite this evolutionary process, the Young Workers' theatres retained their own peculiar qualities. The actors were all young people, the majority of whom continued to work in the factories, thus maintaining a close connection with their own environment. Most of the plays produced are still written by the group. The Young Workers' theatres remain closely associated with the clubs, and their work is one of the most fruitful branches of club activities. These theatres are often used for political and social campaigns. They introduce new songs, new games and new manners to the working youth. Their performances are of a specific nature and serve a variety of purposes.

RED ARMY THEATRES

The educational importance of the theatre has led to the founding of special theatres of which the most interesting are the numerous children's theatres, and the Red Army theatres. The aim of the latter is to raise the cultural



NEMIROVITCH-DANCHENKO THEATRE.—*Katerina Ismailova*, opera by Shostakovitch, Act IV. Produced by B. Mordvinov. Setting by V. Dmitriev. Directed by Nemirovitch-Danchenko.

level of the army. The Red Army theatres are regarded as part of the network of educational institutions for young people. In most of the bigger cities there are what are called Red Army Clubs. These have good libraries, a number of study-circles for general subjects, and others for music and the theatre. The form of entertainment supplied to the Red Army varies from the non-professional theatre to performances of a high artistic level. There are ensembles or choruses of Red Army singers, there are Punch-and-Judy shows, and marionette theatres which present agitational comedies, easily understood by the masses of the army. Their portability permits of their being easily transferred from one place to another wherever the troops happen to be. The travelling theatres played a very important part during the Civil War in maintaining the enthusiasm and high morale of the soldiers. During peace-time the work aims at the education of the citizens who later will return to civilian life and help to reconstruct their country.

That is why the repertory of the Red Army is never lowered or simplified. Besides plays on the Civil War and the life of to-day, it includes

the classics of the stage. The Moscow Red Army Theatre, for instance, produced Ostrovsky's *The Jesters*. In its creative work it takes into account the special character of the audience and of non-professional art.

CHILDREN'S THEATRES

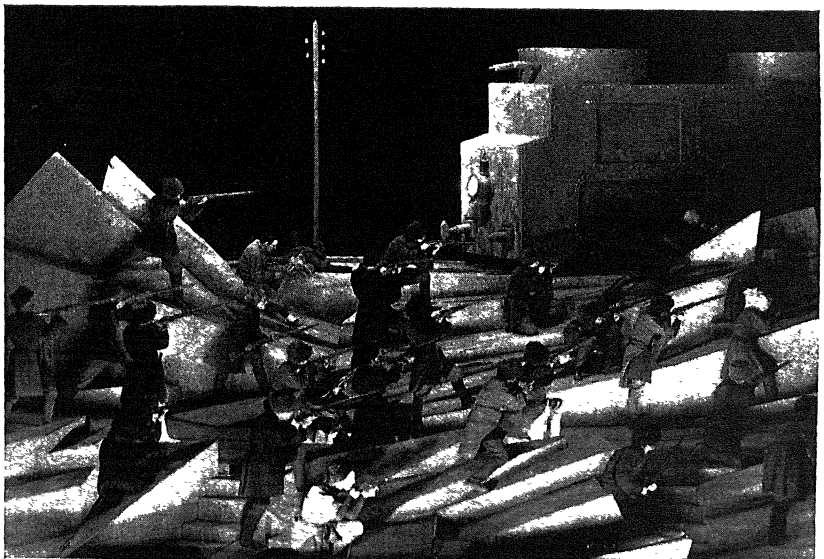
The children's theatres, by which we mean theatres where grown-up actors perform plays for children, have had to struggle against bad traditions. The pre-revolutionary performances were full of cloying moralisms, bad taste, and hypocrisy. The many children's theatres at the present time are an expression of the love and care expended upon the rising generation. These theatres aim at being artistic, educational and entertaining at the same time. A great deal of educational work is carried on in connection with the production of plays. Visits to the theatres are organised by the schools. These visits are always preceded by thorough explanatory work. Meetings of delegates have become an indispensable part of the Leningrad Theatre for Young Audiences. The children's reactions to plays are carefully studied. Anything that arouses unhealthy curiosity or

nervous excitement is cut out. The artistic side is based on the peculiarities of child-psychology at various stages of development, and there are plays to suit every age from seven or eight to fourteen or fifteen. Teachers and workers in the children's theatre remark that directness of perception is one of the chief characteristics of the young spectator, together with " difficulty in keeping his attention fixed. This hinders him from concentrating on anything that has lost freshness and sharpness of immediate interest and drives him to seek ever new objects for his attention, which are often to be found outside the artistic entertainment presented to him." Taking these points into consideration, the plays are made as clear-cut and dynamic as possible, while at the same time mere mechanical changes of impression are avoided. The theatres which arose out of children's games are now capable of giving finished performances. Many theatres, such as the Pedagogical in Moscow, even now draw the young audience into direct participation in the plays. The children prompt the hero of the play, supplying him with necessary information, or are appointed judges and condemn or defend one or another of the actors. In its

search for the right player, the theatre has been obliged to create a " synthetic " actor who is to have mastered " the art of dialogue, combined with those of singing and dancing."

There is no doubt that the Young People's Theatre in Leningrad, and the Children's Theatre in Moscow, directed by Natalia Satz, clearly recognise the necessity for a high level of synthetic theatre-culture. The drama of everyday life does not satisfy an audience of children. The latter demands entertaining " theatricality." That is why music plays such a large part in these performances. It permeates the whole play, aiding the actor to be rhythmic and expressive.

The children's theatres make wide use of the latest achievements of the modern theatre. The Young People's Theatre in Leningrad gives its performances on a stage resembling the Greek orchestra or the arena of a circus. Instead of the tiers of boxes or the square of stalls and pit there is a semi-circular amphitheatre of benches, running right down to the floor. The stage itself consists of a semi-circular platform in direct contact with the first row of benches, a proscenium and a shallow back-stage. The proscenium and the platform are thus



RUSTAVELLI THEATRE (Tiflis).—*Anzor* by Vsevolod Ivanov, Act IV. Translated into Georgian by S. Shanshiashvili.

surrounded by spectators. The children see the actors " in the round." The fireworks of false illusionism disappear. The children never for a moment forget that they are present at an interesting entertainment. One of the directors of the Children's Theatre declared that the child's natural hostility to shams and falsehoods must be taken into consideration: " Whoever wishes to play with children must become a child himself, and that means—be sincere in everything to himself." The actors performing on this stage feel their audience. They have made a study of child-psychology, and the methods they use are simple, calculated to reach their audience. Their repertory includes the classics, folk-tales and plays in plain but convincing language that tell of the great deeds of our time. Among modern plays, the most popular have been *The Robinson Crusoes of the Altai* and *My Brother.*

CHAPTER X

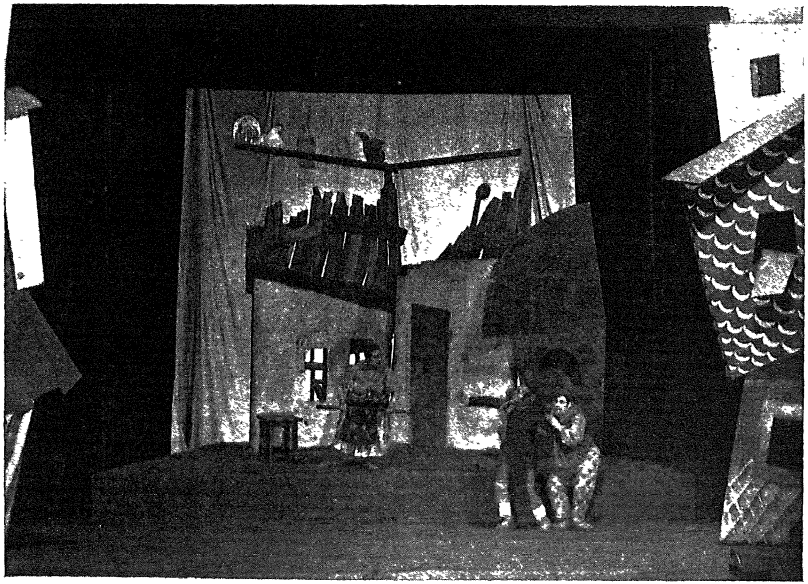
THEATRES OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

THE CREATIVE forces of the non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union were demonstrated at the Olympiad held in Moscow. Eighteen national theatres took part in this, and about a thousand actors. The theatres included : the Jewish Theatre of White Russia, the White Russian State Theatre, several Ukrainian theatres, the Georgian Rustavelli Theatre, the Armenian, the Burki, the Bashkir, the Turcoman, Mari, the Tartar Dramatic Theatre, the Tartar Opera, the Uzbek Dramatic and the Uzbek Musical Theatres. Over fifty plays were performed, including adaptations of the classics, plays by national dramatists and Russian Soviet playwrights. Other forms of national art were also represented : thirty films were shown and twenty musical, instrumental and vocal *ensembles* contributed to ten ethnographical concerts. Still, this was only a fragmentary picture of the great minor

nationalities' theatrical movement. Far from all the nationalities were represented ; the Gipsy Theatre, for instance, was absent. Since that time the number of national theatres has increased, and the standards have improved considerably. The national policy of the Soviet Union has been proved right from one more angle—that of art. However varied in ideological strength and standards of art the performances may have been, they eloquently portrayed the rapid growth of the country.

Many of the national theatres have reached the level of the leading Moscow theatres. They show great technical skill and a high level of theatrical culture. Their work cannot be considered apart from the work of all the theatres of the Soviet Union. Although each preserves its own special style, it is easy to discern a common tendency among them. It is clear that they are all united by the realisation of their social and political aim. Their directors feel themselves not only artists of the stage but builders of socialism, not only the founders of their national art, but the pioneers of communist culture. The Ukrainian Red Factory Theatre defines its aim as : "Active participation in the general work of socialist construction :

the awakening and drawing of the working masses into the process of national and cultural construction now going on at a tremendous pace in the Ukraine ; the dialectic presentment from a class point of view of phenomena, types and problems of our day, as well as of the historic events of the past." The founder of the Jewish theatre of White Russia, Raffalsky, says that " the theatre should be a useful institution and actively serve the interests of our socialist construction. It should carry on agitational work and propaganda, penetrate to the very heart of life, sweep away all the obstacles that hinder our growth and progress, and confirm all that will lead to the victory of socialism. The national theatre resembles our national culture as a whole : it is not an end in itself, but simply a means of internationalising the masses." Akhmetelli, the director of the Georgian Rustavelli Theatre, holds that " the task before the theatre is to serve the socialist Cultural Revolution."



MOSCOW JEWISH STATE THEATRE.—*The Journey of Benjamin III.*

GROWTH OF THE NATIONAL THEATRES

The increase in the number of national theatres is remarkable. Before the revolution the Ukraine had seen but one attempt to found a serious theatre—Sadovsky's—but had at its disposal a great number of fine ethnographical casts with actors of great talent. To-day there are four opera houses, more than ten State dramatic and twenty travelling theatres for worker settlements. The Tartar Republic has theatres in Kazan, Astrakhan, Orenburg and Ufa, and in addition, hundreds of non-professional theatre-circles.

Contact with the audience is becoming closer. Eighty per cent of the audiences in the Ukrainian theatres buy their tickets collectively—that is, through their trade unions or other organisations. Almost all the seats for the performances of the White Russian State Theatre are reserved a month ahead by various factories, institutions and trade unions. The Bashkir Theatre undertook " patronage " over villages and detachments of Red Army soldiers, and provided instructors for the non-professional circles. (Patronage involves systematic assistance.) The national theatre has fought for

its achievements and overcome the harmful traditions of the past. Half of the pupils of the Turki theatre-school had first to be taught how to read and write. In many places the idea of a theatre met with a great deal of opposition on the part of hostile class elements, because it went against established custom. Two Uzbek actresses were assassinated because they had left off their veils and taken to the stage. The clergy clung to their religious ceremonies, endeavouring to attract the public to them as a substitute for the national theatre. The theatre became a battlefield of the class war. Differences in social environment and the uneven cultural level determine the differences in every theatre. Although they have tendencies in common, they go their own respective ways.

Some of the nationalities, such as the Ukrainians, Armenians, White Russians, Georgians and Jews had their own theatres before the Revolution. Their temperamental, ethnographic art attracted large Russian audiences. The success of the Ukrainian Theatre was based on its songs, its effective dancing and local colour. The " national " spirit of these theatres had nothing to do with the progressive spirit of

the other theatres. The non-Russian theatres suffered a great deal by comparison with those of the predominating nationality. Lacking support, they could not settle down as permanent institutions, and remained travelling-companies. The talents of actors were wasted on a petty-bourgeois repertory, in constant travelling, on performances given without the guiding hand of a qualified producer and without suitable scenery or settings. The Tsarist government strictly controlled and only tolerated the national theatres as an inoffensive form of amusement, or a faint echo of the Russian theatres. During the Revolution, the problem for these national minorities was not the founding of theatres—since some of them already existed—but their reconstruction. What they had to do was to make a critical evaluation of their past, and to show a real desire to found a new form of national art.

For the other nationalities—the Tartar, Bashkirs, Turkis, Turcomans, Uzbeks and Mari—it was a different matter. They had to fight for the very creation of their theatres. Medieval conditions, backwardness, moral and religious prejudices, hindered the pioneers of the national stage. Religious rites took the

place of the stage, just as in the Middle Ages the Russian-Byzantine church services were the substitute for plays to simple folk. Until 1917 Turki women had no right to act on the stage. Theatres were established among peoples who were for the most part illiterate. The work of this group of theatres was directed, naturally, to the establishment, defence and organisation of the national theatre in the face of fierce religious opposition.

THE BREAK WITH PAST NATIONAL REPERTORIES

The repertory of the pre-revolutionary national theatre (where any existed) did not answer the new requirements. An investigation of it showed the most deplorable results. The sentimental Ukrainian melodramas, the heart-rending plays of Gordin, silly operettas—such a repertory of hopelessness, of suppressed yearning and smug morality—contained no promise of a brilliant renaissance. Two or three classical comedies in Ukrainian, the plays of the Armenian, Sundukian, a few Georgian pieces, and adaptations from Jewish classics—this was all that could be used, and even that

only after revision. The chief problem was to create a new drama.

The formerly inaccessible national past, which could now be reproduced on the stage in bright and convincing colours, held a new and strong attraction. Heroic and tragic historical plays were intermingled with national legends. The names of well-known heroes brought the stage nearer to the audience. Up-to-date producers put new life into the theatre and solved new problems of production on the basis of historical drama in a lofty and declamatory style. In these plays they sought a national style, and they had to apply the original style in new conditions.

In their treatment of modern subjects the playwrights followed the path traced by the Soviet Russian dramatists—from the rudimentary but memorable agitational fragments to profoundly generalised social plays. Some of the plays were merely of national importance, but others outgrew national limits. There is a vast difference between the first timid attempts of the Uzbeks and Turkis and the finished productions of such Ukrainian dramatists as Mikitenko and Kulish. Attention is centred on two subjects : the transformation of private

life and the heroism of the Civil War. The revolutionary struggle of the past and the recent Civil War were generally the subjects chosen by both Soviet Russian and national playwrights. Turki writers describe the re-birth and the new freedom of their country. Young White Russians treat of the problems arising out of the industrialisation of their republic. The national minority playwrights are not only faced with the problem of subject matter, for that is a common problem of all Soviet dramatists ; they are faced with the problem of creating an art " proletarian in content, and national in form," an art which will create significant and original plays.

ADAPTATION OF SOVIET PLAYS

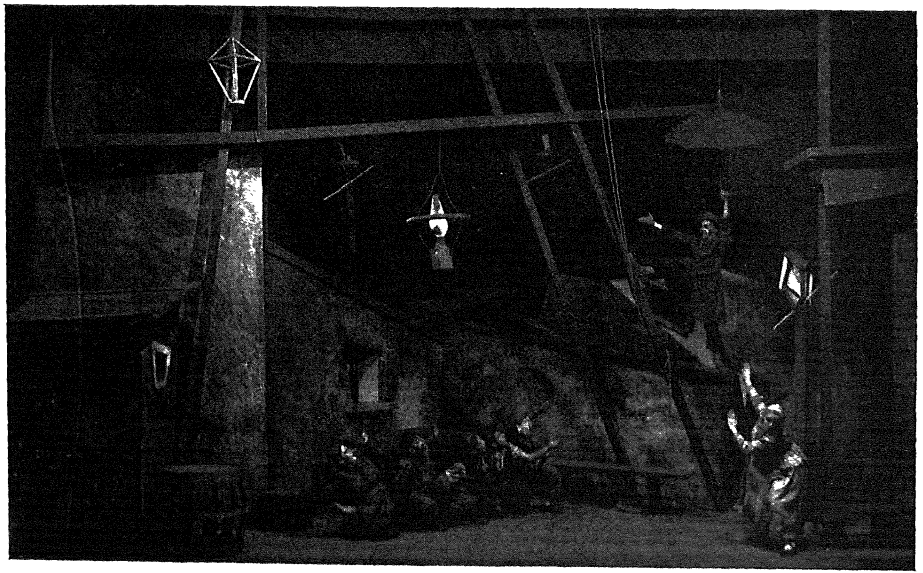
Important results are achieved through the production of the plays of Soviet playwrights and classics. The theatre enriches its repertory by the study and assimilation of these plays, the world classics, and the plays of the dramatists of the oldest Soviet republics. The choice of Russian plays usually falls on those treating of the life of the republics. The Uzbeks chose Furmanov's *Rebellion* because the action takes

MOSCOW JEWISH STATE THEATRE.—*The Journey of Benjamin III.*

place in Central Asia during the Civil War. The play did not require alteration ; the only difference was that more stress was laid on Uzbek life. The Armenian Theatre staged Yanovsky's play *Fury*—dealing with collectivisation of the village—merely transferring the scene of action to an Armenian village, without making any important changes in the construction. The Rustavelli Theatre, however, made radical alterations in Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train.* The text of the play was altered. The action was transferred from Siberia to Dagestan, the movement and even the characters of the play were changed. The peasant rising was emphasised. Vershinin, the Siberian partisan, became Angor ; the Siberian peasants became Caucasian mountaineers, and the connection between the leader and the masses was drawn much closer. The theatre did not disdain to use romantic national touches, as for instance in the scene in the mountain village, where Georgian dances and songs were introduced. Revolutionary passion is thus mingled with national romanticism in a play which has much beauty and power.

ADAPTATION OF THE CLASSICS

On the Soviet stage the classics are treated in a modern way, and the national stage sometimes tried to adapt them to suit national conditions. There were, however, unsuccessful attempts on the part of the Turki Theatre at outward adaptation of the classics. In order to bring home the idea of *Hamlet* to the audience, the Turki Theatre of Azerbaijan transformed the Danish court into a medieval and purely imaginary Azerbaijan. Shakespeare's drama naturally proved strange and contradictory to the life of Azerbaijan, where kings and splendid courts had never been known. The adaptations of the stories of Scholom Aleihem by the Jewish Theatre of Moscow, and of Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* by the Jewish Theatre of White Russia, and of *Peppo* by the Armenian Theatre, are examples of much more correct interpretations of the classics. These productions are important. The young director Litvinov found an excellent way of treating Lope de Vega's great drama, which had been frequently played in our theatres during the first few years of the Revolution. He cut out all the royal scenes, and developed and



MOSCOW JEWISH STATE THEATRE.—*200,000*, based on a comedy by Sholom-Alekheim. Setting by A. Stepanov.

extended the scenes from peasant life, thus destroying all monarchistic tendencies. He sensed the broad social background, and bridged the gulf between the audience of the Spanish Renaissance and that of the Jewish village. He created a fine tragedy out of the peasant life of feudal Spain. Tyshler's brilliant settings and Litvinov's delicate work gave the picturesque, rebellious Spanish village an economical, decorative expression. The melodious speech, graceful movements and dances were not stylised. Instead he presented the colourful, rebellious village of medieval Spain. The producer combined Jewish art with Spanish. In order to liven up *Peppo*—a nineteenth-century classic—the Armenian Theatre made use of the element of " folk-games in the play. It linked up, as it were, Sunduniants with Goldoni, and in restoring the theatrical power of Sunduniants, restored the classic itself to new life. The " moral " idea of the play was changed to the " social." The directors altered the " moral " differences in the characters to the point where " morals " turned into satire. The theatre reinterpreted the play. It examined Sunduniants through the eyes of the present. The old classics shone out anew in the temperamental,

conventional acting which never became vague and which revealed the essence of Armenia's past.

USE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC HERITAGE

The theatres had to come to a decision as to the correct attitude to take up to their ethnographically valuable heritage. The Uzbek, Bashkirian, and Caucasian dances are an art in themselves.

They are admired both in their own country and among strangers. It was a temptation to fill in the performance with them, and display the strange exotic beauty of a little-known world. It was the more tempting since these people had never before been able to display their vast store of rhythms and songs to the full. Some theatres used these as interludes and enlivened all the bazaar and street scenes with songs and dances. In course of time it became clear that this worship of the "national heritage" was only arresting the growth of the theatre.

The Georgian director, Akhmetelli, in working on *Lamara* also studied Georgian gestures and intonation. It was not, however, the

" oriental " movements themselves that he regarded as important, but the laws that govern them, laws which must serve as a foundation for the actors' technique and must be constructively employed in any valid production.

Another important problem was the selection of those stages of general theatrical evolution which had to be studied. The question of the " ethnographic " heritage proved to be closely connected with the choice of the path to be followed by the national theatres.

A detailed repetition of all the stages passed by the Soviet theatre is not necessary for the national theatre. Such procedure can only be excused as a temporary condition, on the road to independent creative work. Imitation would do more harm to national art than naked " ethnographism." There should be neither subordination nor opposition to the Soviet Theatre, but the assimilation and study of the foundations of the actor's and producer's art. There should be neither aloofness in the name of " ethnographic faithfulness " nor blind imitation, but a close study of those elements of culture without which the national theatre cannot develop. There should be no

scaling down and polishing to the level of Moscow theatres, but the treatment of international subject matter in a national form, in accordance with the best methods of the modern theatre. Only thus can national art be assured of success. This combination can be seen in a convincing, but not yet perfect form, in the Georgian Rustavelli Theatre, the White Russian State Theatre, the White Russian Jewish Theatre, and the Armenian Theatre.

The above all regard themselves as part of the network of Soviet theatres. Although national, they reject nationalism. They regard problems of the actor's and producer's methodology as of first importance. Particular attention is paid to the peculiarities of the local actor. The producers have replaced chaotic, ethnographical entertainment by the strict laws of national rhythmic movement, voice-training, modern staging and a general, harmonious arrangement of the performance.

THE MOSCOW JEWISH KAMERNY THEATRE

The productions of the Moscow Jewish Kamerny Theatre are of a particularly high

artistic level. This theatre has achieved a great deal, not only for the Jewish theatre, but for the development of the Soviet theatre in general. The theatre is built upon the vivacious national temperament, and keeps within the strict rhythmic confines of a theatre of spontaneous acting. It takes into consideration the national physical and psychological nature of the Jewish actor. Every season the theatre widens the extent of its activities. It includes a number of Jewish classics, foreign plays, and modern works dealing with the ideas of the social revolution. It is national not only in name, but in essence. It is less a social and class theatre, and is expressive of the soul of the liberated Jewish proletariat.

When one sees this "Jewish acting" one cannot fail to be struck by the emotional appeal and rapidity of movement, the intensity of speech and vigour of the gestures. In its early productions, when the old repertory was being revived, poor Jews in tattered garments and comical masks of rich Jews—in frock-coats and stately, old-fashioned robes with colourful trimmings—would dart and dance about on the curious platforms and crooked staircases, in an ecstasy of delight. They were the Jews of the

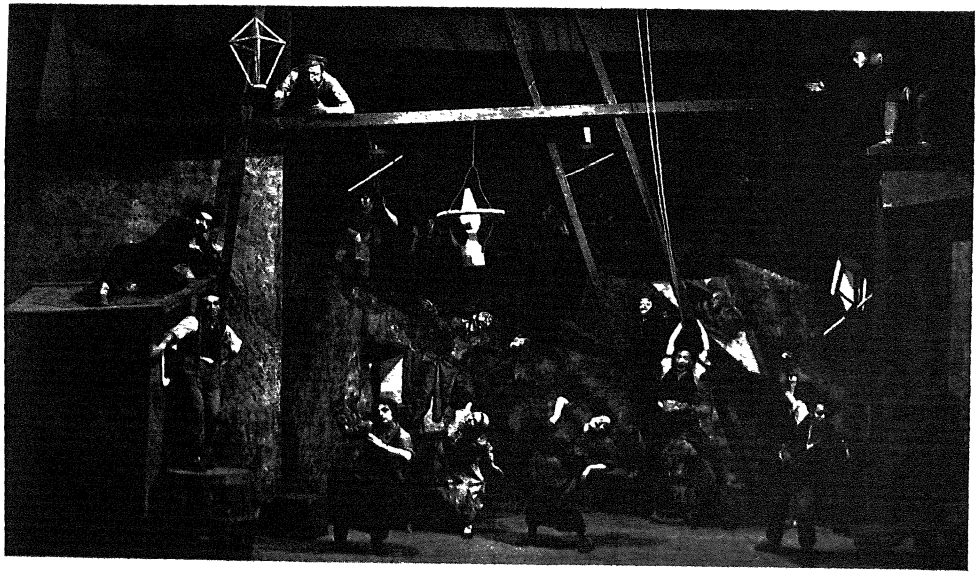
poorer slums. They would stand for a moment in a solemn stillness, like monuments, before dashing away into the hum of the market-place, or springing from one platform to another, or rushing down a flight of stairs and away. The players in the Jewish theatre are buoyant, strong and vital. There is no hint of the "ancient Hebrew sorrow" about them. "The will to live" is the *leit-motiv* of the theatre. "The will to build socialism" is becoming its theme. The director controls this easily-roused, fiery temperament with the firm bridle of set tasks. The flamboyant rhythm of Jewish theatrical productions is born of the rhythm and tempo of the Jewish crowd. National speech and gesticulation is given rhythmic, musical form. The theatre discovered and strengthened the rhythmic foundations of the national gestures and the musical foundations of the Yiddish tongue, which did not lie in Talmudic chants or synagogue songs, but the harmonious speech of the street, the bazaar, the town. The Jewish theatre became the basis of a new type of melody of speech. The theatre endowed it with a slightly exalted quality, completely in accord with the movements. There is no discrepancy between word and

gesture, they form a closely linked unity. Every play produces an impression of extreme efficacy, which is internal as well as external. Every movement is in complete harmony with the movements and gestures of the whole *ensemble*, and is responsive to it. Here is a "system" of movement meeting movement. As the dynamics of the piece grows, so does the movement gain in solidity and strength.

All these methods, worked out in the course of restoring and revising the Jewish classics, were also applied by the Jewish theatre to modern subject matter. The latter demands still more perfect craftsmanship and clarity. In developing the "will to live," the Jewish theatre is creating productions of great social significance. That "social optimism" of which we spoke in connection with Soviet drama is particularly characteristic of the Jewish theatre. It is not surprising that the creative and experimental research which was begun in this theatre during the first few years of the Revolution should have had such a decided influence upon the development of the national theatres of the Soviet Union.

The more striking and actual the ideas in its productions, the more urgently the theatre

feels the need for an elastic, precise, stage language. The path of the national theatre is a path of struggle. The more attention it pays to studying the methods of the modern theatre, the less it is attracted by abstract "ethnographism." The more attentively it follows the development of its own people, the surer will it approach its goal. Out of the enthusiasm for socialist construction, the analysis of national traits, the mastery and study of the culture of to-day, the vital lasting productions of the national theatres are born.



MOSCOW JEWISH STATE THEATRE.—*200,000*, based on a comedy by Sholom-Alekheim. Setting by A. Stepanov.

CHAPTER XI

THE AIM OF THE SOVIET THEATRE

THE SIXTEENTH anniversary of the Revolution found the Soviet theatre enthusiastically and actively at work. We who have taken part in and witnessed its growth, who see its contradictions and deficiencies, cannot but see at the same time that if much has been done already, much still remains to be done. The phases which the theatre has passed through are only a beginning—not a completion. We are working out new dramatic principles, not for the sake of perpetuating them, but for the sake of further development.

The artists of the stage have recognised the tremendous political, artistic, and educational influence of the theatre, and thus assumed their share of responsibility to the country.

One of the chief things about the work of the Soviet theatre is that it strives not merely to represent, but to *change the world.* It discloses the treasures of the past and the heroism of the

present. This it does for the sake of the new world that is being built up in a socialist country. It remains in its essence agitational, for it has a message, a summons to a new life, a new classless society. Under the conditions of the second Five-Year Plan the theatre has been assigned the task of transforming the individual, and bringing up citizens of the socialist State.

The theatre cannot, therefore, confine itself to one definite type. It would need a great variety of types to express all the various problems of the Soviet Union. We speak of " socialist realism " in literature and the theatre. Socialist realism, which means truth in the ideas and emotions directed towards the transformation of the world, is the essence and not merely the form of Soviet art. The theatre has long ceased to be an empiric chronicler of facts. It has long since given up the photographic representation of reality. But to be truthful does not necessarily mean to give up all the romance of the Revolution. On the contrary, to be truthful means to look forward into the future.

The dream of a socialist future is being realised under our eyes. No one can foretell what form the theatre is to assume or what new

methods it will employ. It is already becoming clear, however, that the non-professional theatre will introduce new principles for the construction of a performance, and that the principle of the synthetic theatre is destined to reveal new horizons. We can already distinguish the outlines of a theatre whose object it is to transform the world.

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