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Title: Our Stage and Its Critics

Author: Edward Fordham Spence

Release date: September 9, 2004 [EBook #13408]
Most recently updated: December 18, 2020

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Jonathan Ingram, Linda Cantoni, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

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OUR STAGE AND ITS CRITICS

BY
"E.F.S."
OF "THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE"
1910

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PREFACE

Whilst reading the proof-sheets of these articles I have been oppressed by the thought that they give a gloomy idea about the state of our Stage. Yet I am naturally sanguine. Indeed, no one taking a deep interest in our drama could have written for a score or so of years about it unless of a naturally sanguine temperament. There has been great progress during my time, yet we still are far from possessing a modern national drama creditable to us. Some imagine that the British have no inborn genius for writing drama, or acting it, and look upon those dramatists and players whose greatness cannot be denied as mere exceptions to a rule. Without alleging that at the moment we have a Shakespeare, a Garrick or a Siddons, I assert confidently that we own dramatists and players able, if rightly used, to make our theatre worthy of our country and also that the misuse of them is appalling. For very many years the history of the English stage has been chiefly a record of waste, of gross commercialism and of honest efforts ruined by adherence to mischievous traditions: the Scottish and Irish stage have been mere reflections of our own.

At the moment Ireland is making a brave and remarkably successful effort at emancipation, and during the last few years has laid the foundations of a National Theatre and built a good deal upon them. Scotland lags a little, yet the energy and enthusiasm of Mr Alfred Wareing and the citizens of Glasgow have enabled them to create an institution not unlikely to serve as the home of a real Scots drama. They offer to the native playwright an opportunity of showing that a national drama—not a drama merely echoing the drama of other lands—lies inherent in the race. Who knows that they may not induce that wayward man of genius, J.M. Barrie, to become the parent of Scots drama by honestly and sincerely using his rare gifts as dramatist in an effort to express the pathos and the humour, the courage and the shyness, the shrewdness and the imagination, and also the less agreeable qualities and characteristics of our brothers across the border.

And England? I have little first-hand knowledge of the provinces, but with such as I possess, and the aid of the *Era Annual* and the *Stage Year Book*, can state unhesitatingly that the position is very unsatisfactory. Admirable, valuable work is being done bravely by Miss Horniman at Manchester; Mr F.R. Benson and his company devotedly carry the banner of Shakespeare through the land; but in the main the playhouses of the provinces and great cities of England offer little more than echoes of the London theatres, and such original works as are produced in them generally are mere experiments made on the dog before a piece is presented in London. In this respect, the suburbs resemble the provinces, although Mr J.B. Mulholland courageously makes efforts to give Hammersmith something new and good. The Coronet has seen some valuable ventures—perhaps Notting Hill is not a suburb—and at the moment is devoted to the production of real novelties.

In the West End theatres of London the position at first sight seems desperate. During the last twenty years, in consequence of the intervention of middlemen, rents have risen 100 per cent.; owing to the folly of managers the salaries of the company have increased to a similar extent; whilst the cost of scenery, costumes and the like also has grown enormously. Indeed, it is probably an under-statement to allege that the money spent in running a theatre on the customary commercial lines is twice as great as it was in 1890. Yet the price of seats has not been raised. Consequently theatre management has become a huge gamble, in which there are few prizes, and the amount of money lost annually is great. Naturally, under such circumstances the principal, almost the only, aim of the ordinary manager is to please the masses. Many concessions are made to the wishes of the crowd, and by way of excuse the phrase "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give" is quoted. It is painful to think that people can quote Johnson's line without a feeling of scorn, yet it necessarily contains an awful amount of truth when theatres are managed under the present mad conditions. What art has ever made progress under laws dictated by the great half-washed?

Half-a-dozen of the West End theatres are devoted to musico-dramatic works which, whatever their merits in other respects, have none as drama, and certainly have done little for the development of English music. As a rule several houses are under the management of American managers and they, putting Mr Frohman aside, rarely prove anything but the sterility of America drama or their contempt for the taste of our playgoers who, however, as a rule prefer native to imported rubbish—hence grumbles in the United States about prejudice and unfair play. Mr Frohman, as part of his repertory scheme, and otherwise as well, has done something to help the modern English dramatist. Putting Shakespeare out of the question, for of course he has nothing to do with English modern drama, we have little in the ordinary London theatre that is not the natural result of bad traditions, and the only progress made is in the direction of increased dexterity in playwriting—unfortunately increased dexterity as a rule in handling old subjects according to the old traditions, which leave the stage curiously outside the world of literature and also of ordinary human life.

On the other hand, thanks to the efforts of many enthusiasts working by means of societies and clubs, such as the Independent Theatre—the first of all—the Century Theatre, the (Incorporated) Stage Society, the Pioneers, the Play Actors and others, and the Play-goers' Club, the O.P. Club and the Gallery First Nighters, and also thanks to the efforts of Messrs Vedrenne and Barker, at the Court Theatre, real progress has been made in London towards the creation of an English modern theatre, and we now possess a valuable body of dramatists, some to a great extent, others altogether, neglected by the ordinary theatre. Speaking of these dramatists collectively, it may fairly be said that their gifts are greater, their ambitions higher and their theories of drama sounder than those of their rivals who work for the ordinary theatre; and I should add that the ordinary theatre is far richer in dramatists of quality than it was twenty years ago. So we have the playwrights.

Also we have the plays. The publication in book form of the best native pieces presented by the enthusiasts of whom I have spoken, but not offered to the general public for a run, would satisfy any critic that the English modern drama exists although we are still waiting for the English modern theatre.

Moreover, we have the players. Some, though not many, of the fashionable stars would serve, whilst there are numbers of really able actresses and actors who have proved their ability to represent modern comedy, but owing to the strange policy of managers are rarely employed by the ordinary theatre—in London. In several cases the policy may be sound, since the regular fare of the fashionable houses as a rule demands a showy, but insincere, style out of the range, or at least the demonstrated range, of the neglected players.

Does the public for such a theatre exist? I think so. The number of playgoers is very large, and although only a comparatively small proportion goes out of its way to patronise the non-commercial drama a very large proportion has grown weary of the ordinary drama—a fact shown by the recent failure of plays which not many years ago would have been successful.

Do the critics exist? They are an important element in the matter. The question is a delicate one for me to answer. Certainly some of our dramatic critics are men of culture and courage, able to appreciate new ideas. The difficulty is more with the newspapers than their representatives. For a sad aspect of the present state of affairs lies in the fact that the desire to obtain tittle-tattle and gossip concerning the players often outweighs the desire to obtain sincere, intelligent criticism, and the result is obvious. There is ten times more "copy" published about the persons and personal affairs of the author of a play and of its players than concerning its merits and faults.

However, after taking all the elements into account, it may confidently be asserted that within the lifetime of the present generation of playgoers radical changes will have taken place, and even if we may not possess tragedy of the highest quality we shall have a theatre of modern English drama—serious comedy and also light comedy and farce—really expressive of current life and thought and fine enough in style to render the most critical Englishman proud of his country's drama.

E.F.S.

October 1910

The thanks of the author are due to the Proprietors and the Editor of *The Westminster Gazette* for kindly consenting to the republication of articles which have already appeared in that journal.

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMATIC CRITIC

His Qualifications

The production of a play in the Russian tongue renders topical a phrase once used, not unhappily, by Mr Cecil Raleigh concerning the qualifications of the dramatic critic. After listening to a somewhat extravagant speech about the duties of the critic, he said that the dramatic critic ought, apparently, to be a "polyglot archangel." During the last few years we have had plays in Russian, Japanese, Bavarian *patois*, Dutch,

German, French and Italian, to say nothing of East End performances in Hebrew and Yiddish, which we neglect. Latin drama we hear at Westminster; a Greek company came to the Court but did not act. A Chinese has been promised, and a Turkish drama threatened; Danish has been given; there are awful hopes of Gaelic and Erse; and goodness knows why we have escaped Echegaray, Lope di Vega and Calderon in the original. A Mezzofanti would be at a premium in the craft if knowledge of languages alone were sufficient; but one may know many tongues and possess no judgment. We have to accept great responsibilities. Some people measure the greatness of the responsibilities by the amount of money involved in theatrical enterprises; it is hardly necessary to discuss seriously this point of view. Nevertheless the fact remains that the voice of the critics has some effect upon the fortunes of ventures involving large sums of money and the employment of many people. It is rather curious to see how lightly as a rule the influence of the critics is regarded; for instance, from some remarks uttered by Sir John Hare it appears that he thinks they are not influential. Here are his words taken from an interview published in a newspaper.

The Interviewer: "How is public taste formed? Do newspaper criticisms affect it?"

Mr Hare: "Very little."

This view is rarely pressed upon a jury by the plaintiff in a libel action, and it may be remarked that although, when a play is running well, some managers almost ignore us, as soon as business drops they become delightfully amiable and long for our presence. Moreover, at considerable expense, they quote our opinions if favourable—even with judicious modifications when unfavourable.

Perhaps the matter of languages is not of very great importance, seeing that most of the critic's work concerns English Drama, or drama in what is supposed to be English, which, too often, is quite a different thing. What, then, are the necessary qualifications of the critic who takes his work and himself seriously?

He should have some knowledge of music—enough, at least, to know whether incidental or "melodrama" music is congruous with the time, place and occasion of the play, and to be able to identify well-known works. At a time when money is spent very lavishly upon scenery and costumes, he ought to possess some theories, or at least ideas, concerning pictorial art, the history of modern painting and the like, and be capable of guessing what a daring experimentalist like Mr Gordon Craig is aiming at and what relation his scene-pictures bear to the current cant of the art critic. It is deplorable when one finds serious critics gushing about the beauty of costly stage effects belonging to the standard of taste exhibited by wedding-cakes, Christmas crackers, old-fashioned valentines and Royal Academicians. Dancing must mean something more to him than a whirling and twirling of human beings—he should at the least know the distinctive styles and figures of different countries, and not confuse an *entrechat* with a *pirouette*, should be aware of the meaning of the terms *arabesque* and *rond de jambe*, and understand to some extent the conventional language and history of grand ballet. No one will deny that his study of history must be substantial and, to put the matter compendiously, he must have a good general education, which, however, will not carry him very far, since he must own a special knowledge of the history of drama and of literature and modern literary movements.

Then comes the question of theories of criticism—can he do with less than, say, an acquaintance with Aristotle, and Lessing's "Laocoon," or even with so little? With Shakespeare and some of his commentators he ought to be at home; the "Paradoxe sur le Comédien" he can hardly escape, and the works of some of the modern English and latest French critics may not be overlooked. Of course he must have read and considered a large number of plays, and the theories on which they are based. Politics he may almost neglect unless there be successors to *John Bull's Other Island*, though he will have to keep abreast of the facts and fancies of modern life, including, to some extent, political matters. How he is to study the customs, usage and manners of polite society among the upper ten thousand it is hard to say. Not a few of us are weak on this point, and feel ill at ease when dealing with the *nuances* of the customs of Mayfair. The study of books on *Savoir Faire* and the Manners of Polite Society certainly will give very little assistance.

Lastly, in this catalogue, which is far from exhaustive, he must study the art of writing, so that he may at least be able to keep clear of the vulgar faults. No one expects him to show any absolute merit in style—space and circumstances of time and place are against him, and to accomplish the negative is quite a positive triumph. Correct grammar, avoidance of hackneyed *clichés*, clearness of phrase, reasonably scholar-like use of words, abstinence from alliteration unless there be due cause, and escape from uncouthness of expression and monotony of sound are all he can hope to exhibit in the way of virtue. Of course a little wit or humour does no harm, provided that no sacrifice of truth is made for the sake of it. Of the moral qualities nothing need be said; he will be exposed to a few great temptations and many little ones: to some of the latter he is certain to yield.

If and when he has acquired all this knowledge, it will be his duty almost to conceal it. It is to be employed as apparatus for the formation of judgments rather than the embellishment of them, though, of course, it may be used reticently by way of illustration, explanation and the like. Yet it may be useful and not illegitimate for him sometimes to try to convince the reader that his criticism is from the pen of one who knows more about the subject than lies within the range of the Man in the Street.

The critic is not superior to the amateur judge by reason of a greater natural aptitude for judging, but because he has a larger stock of knowledge on which to base his judgments, possesses a wider basis for comparison—the foundation of all opinion—and has trained his natural aptitudes; consequently, whilst his criticism necessarily, like that of the Man in the Street, is relative, not absolute, is after all merely an *ipse dixit*, it is the personal view of the better-trained person.

The pessimist may suggest that it is hardly worth while to endeavour to become such an Admirable Crichton, that the labour will not be sufficiently remunerated, that the existing British Drama does not demand or deserve criticism by such cultured experts.

There are few of us fully qualified, according to the standard put forward in these lines, and it may be

added, without anything in the nature of mock-modesty, that the author is well aware of the fact that he cannot be reckoned among the few.

His Knowledge of Fashionable Society

A passage in *Lady Huntworth's Experiment* did not earn the laugh deserved by it. Captain Dorvaston was supposed to read a passage from *The Special Monthly Journal*, to this effect: "The shield bore for device a bar sinister, with *fleur-de-lys rampant*"; then he said, "That ain't heraldry." Lady Huntworth replied, "Yes, it is; Family Heraldry," and he laughed. The passage in the play brought forward vividly the thought that those who really live in the aristocratic world may smile at our high-life dramas just as they do at the stories that appear concerning the nobility in obscure "family" papers. There is, and during a long time has been, a mania among playwrights for putting aristocratic characters upon the stage. It may be that this is due to the snobbishness of players, who, in comedy, love to represent a lord: they can be kings and queens only in tragedies; or to that of the audience, which likes to see the representation of the nobility; or, again, it may be caused by the snobbishness of the dramatist and his wish to suggest that he knows all about the "upper succles."

It need not be assumed that we are much worse in this respect than our neighbours across that Channel which some desire to have destroyed and so nullify the famous John of Gaunt speech. In books and plays the Gallic writers are almost as fond of presenting the French aristocracy as are our dramatists and novelists of writing works concerning the British Peerage. Even putting the actual peerage aside, the question is important, whether the pictures in fiction—particularly in drama—of what one may call Belgravia or Mayfair are correct. We critics hardly know; and it may be a solecism to suggest that the same applies to the studies of the Faubourg St Germain. Perhaps that famous faubourg has lost its distinction.

The question may seem a little difficult yet must be asked: How do our dramatists and the French manage to get a first-hand study of the real aristocracy? Of course, nowadays, there are a large number of houses owned by people with titles, and sometimes very noble titles, which can easily be penetrated. Speaking quite apart from politics, one may say that the British aristocracy year by year makes itself cheaper and cheaper, losing thereby its title to existence. The city clerk can do better than Dick Swiveller, and decorate his bed-sitting room with a photographic gallery of *décolletées* duchesses, and bare-legged ladies of noble family, and he is able to obtain a vast amount of information, part of it quite accurate, concerning their doings.

Yet, even when we get far higher than the city clerk, and reach the fashionable playwright, to say nothing of the dramatic critic, there are mysteries unexplorable. There is a Lhasa in Mayfair, our efforts to attain which are Burked.

A big Bohemian, sporting "smart-set," Anglo-American, South African millionaire society exists which has in it a good many people acknowledged by Debrett, and this it is quite easy to enter. There are a score or so of peers, and twice the number of peeresses, as well as smaller fry, possessing titles by birth or marriage, with whom it is not difficult, and not always desirable, to become acquainted. The real aristocracy looks askance at them. When we see pictures of these, or studies on the French stage of the titled *faiseurs*, or *rastaquouères*, we know that they may be correct, and indeed the figures in them have become to such an extent despecialised that we can judge of the truthfulness of the study by the simple process of assuming that they do not possess any titles at all.

Still, there remains a world beyond, where, to some extent at least, manners and ideas are different from those of the upper-middle-class, or the middle-middle-class, to whichever it may be that our craft belongs. People will recollect Thackeray's remarks concerning the impossibility of getting to know the real domestic life of your French friends; whether his words are well founded or not, they illustrate the essential unknowability to the outsider of some of the great noble and even untitled county families of the land. It is said that there still exist some great ladies who have not cheapened themselves by allowing their photographs to be published in the sixpenny papers. Yet our dramatists, or some at least, seem to think that a play is vulgar unless amongst the *dramatis personae* one can find a lord or two.

Perhaps indolence is their excuse. You call a character the Duke of Smithfield, and thereby save yourself much trouble; you need not explain that he is rich, or how he came to be rich, or why he has no work to do. You have ready-made for you the supposition of a mass of details as to manner and prejudices. If the heroine's father is an earl and the hero a commoner, such as a barrister or a doctor, the mere statement of these facts is useful matter for your story. If the dramatist writes about the kind of earl who belongs to that inner set of the aristocracy, in the existence of which some of us innocently believe, how does he set about his task?

Even when the ordinary playwright handles the ruck-and-run of the "nobs," his acquaintance with them can hardly justify him in regarding his studies as founded upon observation. To see people in the stalls and meet them at public "functions," or the large entertainments of a semi-private character which it is easy to penetrate, gives poor opportunity for close scrutiny. Is there amongst the dramatists—and novelists too—something akin to the system of the islanders who earned a living by taking in one another's washing? Is there a vicious circle, in which each and all accept as true what others have written? Do they merely help themselves out of the common fund of ignorance?

Possibly this is based upon a delusion. The whole aristocracy may have become so democratic that it is quite easy to study the most exclusive at first hand, if you happen to be a successful dramatist, but very few of the dramatic critics are successful dramatists.

The opportunities for the critic are limited except when a peeress happens to have written a play, and even then a candid critic does not get very far. Perhaps, too, if some inner circle exists there is no need to study it; for a knowledge of the titled folk floating in the great three-quarter world that is taking the place of Society

may suffice, and to have met a countess at a musical reception, of five hundred or so, given by some millionaire amateur, or to have been on the board of a catchpenny company with a baron, or to have suffered long at a charity ball and obtained introductions from a ducal steward, or to have bought a cup of bad tea at an Albert Hall bazaar from a marchioness whose manners would shock a cook, is a sufficient acquaintance with the customs, thoughts and ideals of all the inhabitants of Debrett, and entitles one to present or to criticize the shyest member of the august House that is now beginning to wonder what is going to happen next.

His Duty and Difficulties

The title is the Duty—not the duties—of a dramatic critic—the latter would be too large a subject. Obviously his duty is to tell the truth. How easy it sounds! How difficult it is to tell even the relative truth; the absolute is out of the question. Suppose that the critic has come to the conclusion that he knows the truth about a play, with what is he to tell it? With language, of course—an appallingly bad piece of machinery, which grows worse and worse every day. When a number of critics have formed the same opinion about a piece, and all wish to say that it is good—a very bad term to employ—one will call it good, another very good; a third, exceedingly good; a fourth, great; a fifth, splendid, a sixth, superb; and so on till some reckless language-monger uses the state-occasion term—a "work of genius." How is the reader to guess that they all mean the same thing? Moreover, if they were to use identical words every reader would put a somewhat different meaning upon them.

"One of my greatest difficulties," a famous physician once said, "lies in the fact that to a great extent I have to rely upon a patient's description of the nature and quantity of pain he or she has suffered from. One will speak of pain where another employs the word agony; the third complains of intense torture; a fourth describes it as intolerable anguish; and a fifth says it hurts a little. Yet they all refer to the same thing. No wonder we are often at sea."

The difficulty increases. Many new words are coined, but old ones are rarely demonetised; they remain in circulation, defaced and worn, till the precise image and superscription are barely recognizable. We multiply negatives in order to get fine shades. If, then, the critic knows the truth he is aware that he has no means of conveying it to the reader. Wherefore some make little effort and indulge merely in fine writing. Hence, too, some excuse for the common incivility of our friends when they say to us, "Well, old man, I read your notice on the —; tell me, is it worth going to see?"

The difficulty of expressing an opinion is hardly less than that of forming it; assume that the critic possesses all the qualifications, so far as knowledge and the natural gift for criticising are concerned—and, alas! knowledge and the gift are very often far apart—and then think of the obstacles to the proper employment of them.

The play may belong to a class which the critic does not like, although it is legitimate; he may not flout it on that account. You should not blame a bream because it is not a barbel, or a chub for not being a trout, yet the angler grumbles if he catches the humbler fish when aiming at the noble; we are all agreed that the gardener was not justified in "larning" with a spade the squalid batrachians to be toads; even musical comedies ought not to be criticized with spade strokes, although in connection with them it is a pity that a spade so rarely has been called by its proper name. Moreover, one may have an entirely unreasonable prejudice against the works of the particular dramatist. We all suffer from strange aversions in literary matters. There are readers of culture who find no pleasure in Borrow, and some nearly shriek at the mere name of Peacock and so on. In fact we have dislikes founded, or rather unfounded, upon the basis of Bussy Rabutin's lines:

"Je ne vous aime point, Hylas;
Je n'en saurois dire la cause.
Je sais seulement une chose.
C'est que je ne vous aime pas."

Next comes an even more intimate personal element—the critic's condition. The day may have been vexing. The present indecent haste of the income-tax collector may have worried him. His dinner may have been bad. Perhaps he had to rush off without his coffee; new boots are a conceivable element; a bad seat in the theatre may annoy him; many managers give better places to their friends in the profession than to the critics. Before now critics have sat out a boisterous farce when suffering from an excruciating tooth-ache.

Moreover, some of the principal players may not be to his taste. There are artists of indisputable merit who are no more palatable to some of us than an untravelled cigar or wines from across the ocean. Think, then, of the unfortunate critic honestly endeavouring to make reasonable allowances for all the matters which may have affected him when forming his judgment.

Such elements are wickedly insidious; it is difficult to believe when one is bored that one would not be bored but for some such adventitious matter. The conscientious critic makes a great effort to be just under such circumstances, and there is great danger that he may out-Brutus Brutus—in the opposite direction. It is very galling, after writing a favourable notice on what seemed to be a tedious play, to have your fellow-workers ask why on earth you treated it so favourably. Consequently, it will be seen that it is often difficult even for the qualified to form a true judgment.

Assuming that the critic has formed what he considers a true judgment, and flatters himself that he is able to find language in which to express it accurately, the question arises how far he ought to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. "Praise, praise, praise," said Mr Pinero; and there is a fine maxim of Vauvenargues—"C'est un grand signe de médiocrité de louer toujours modérément."

However, the question whether we are or, worse still, seem mere mediocrities does not greatly trouble most of us poor "brushers of noblemen's clothes"; by-the-by the expression quoted by Bacon might serve as an argument in a certain great controversy, if it be assumed that it was applied to the dramatic critics of his day. Yet unmerited praise on the whole does more harm than undeserved blame.

On the other hand, truth is wisely kept at the bottom of a well, for the world cannot stand much of it. Perhaps it is judicious in the critic sometimes to be a little more amiable than the truth, in order to encourage the beginner and the manager who has given him a chance, and also sometimes to insist disproportionately upon defects, so as to stir up a too complacent dramatist of reputation. Moreover, whilst the point is immaterial to the audience, the critic's expression of a judgment upon a particular piece must vary with the author, since, for instance, to censure without allowances the work of the tyro for faults of inexperience is obviously unreasonable, whilst one may easily praise with excess the mere dexterities of the trained pack. Taking all these matters into account, it will be seen that it is very difficult for the critic to do his duty, and yet truth will out sometimes in a criticism.

His Stock Phrases

There are moments when the critics think that it might almost be wise to begin their notices on a new play by dealing with the acting. For the criticism of the acting is the most trying part of our work, and though, as a rule, it does not occupy more than say a fourth of the article—if so much—it often takes as long to write as the rest. Indeed, the shorter it is the longer it takes, for the difficulty of nice employment of language is in direct ratio to the brevity of matter. With half-a-column in which to move about there is no trouble in finding finely contrasted adjectives and avoiding repetition of epithets.

We all feel—and correctly—that when the play is new our greatest energy should be devoted to it. Indeed, there is a strong tendency to adopt the idea contained in a phrase of Mr Gordon Craig's to the effect that the players are "performers in an orchestra," and since a play is not like a piece of chamber-music, where the performers are treated individually, but rather resembles a work performed by a full band, there is an almost valid excuse for paying comparatively little attention to the acting. Sometimes one makes desperate endeavours to avoid dealing with the company in a lump at the end by referring in the descriptive account (which is the journalistic contribution to the criticism) to the individual performers; but it is not easy to do so without interfering with the course of the description.

There are many difficulties in treating the work of the actors and actresses briefly, but to handle it at length and in proportion would require a space which editors are unable to give. No doubt the first of the difficulties is the one already indicated. Wrongly or rightly, it is felt (even by journalists who do not accept the traditions of *The Daily Telegraph*) that there is a poverty-stricken air about the use of the same adjective in consecutive sentences, and though we try to be honest in opinion, we have a workman's vanity in our efforts which asserts itself strongly and causes us, at some sacrifice of accuracy, to vary the epithets.

Moreover, single adjectives tell very little.

To say that Mr X. acted admirably, Miss Y. gave a capital performance, Mr Z. played in excellent style, gives little information, and when there are half-a-dozen to be named it is almost impossible to ring the changes. Furthermore, perhaps unconsciously, we are moved, fatuously no doubt, by the feeling that the earlier part of the article is intensely interesting to all the world, but that no one save the players and their personal friends and enemies will even glance at these concluding sentences. Yet one knows that they are of serious importance to the persons actually concerned, though some of them say that they never read them.

The fact that so many theatres are in the hands of actor-managers is one reason why these phrases are important, for the actor-manager is compelled very often to choose or refuse a player on the strength of hearsay testimony: ours is hearsay evidence in the most accessible form, and even the managers have some belief in the soundness of the judgment of several of us. They all recognise the fact that we tend to create public opinion, and that an actor or actress much spoken of admiringly in the papers excites the curiosity of playgoers, and is a useful addition to a cast. Consequently we feel that in speaking of or ignoring individual performers we are affecting them to some extent in earning their livelihood.

There is a story concerning a critic upon whose death half the stage went into quarter-mourning. If it be true, it showed that he was very short-sighted in his amiability, for when dealing with an overcrowded profession one must remember that ill-earned praise of A may keep B, who is more worthy, from getting A's place, to which, of course, he has a better title. It is very hard to act upon this proposition, although it involves a duty, for it is much easier to imagine the positive hurt to A than the negative injury to B; the critic in question probably shut his eyes to this, if he ever thought of it, and died comfortably unaware of the fact that his indiscriminating praise had kept many meritorious people out of their rights.

Even supposing one masters the illogical feeling of the lamented critic, difficulties arise. We have grown very velvet-tongued in these days. There was no nonsense about our predecessors; if the leading lady was plain, they said so, whilst if one of us were to suggest that the heroine, whose beauty is talked of tiresomely during the play, in real life might sit in unflattering safety under mistletoe till the berries shrivelled he would be regarded as an ungentle manlike brute. This is rather awkward.

There is an injustice in being forced into a conspiracy of silence about the figure or face of a lady who would catch cold at kiss-in-the-ring, yet is supposed at first sight to set Romeo's pulses throbbing madly, and when the dear creatures whom we loved a quarter of a century ago appear to us unsuitable for *ingenue* parts we feel that it is a terrible breach of duty not to say so, yet it is painful to be candid.

Now and again the matter becomes ridiculous, and we venture to make oblique suggestions; but even this is a poor accomplishment of our task. Yet it seems appallingly rude and direct to say that Miss X. showed

intelligence and technical skill, but is too old or too fat or too ugly for her part; and managers rely upon our reticence and upon pictures in which the sun helps photographers in a game of deception—perhaps that unfortunate victim of the November fogs may resent the suggestion of conspiracy, and complain of fraudulent tricks with negatives—and so the public is deceived. Also, undated photographs are used—fraudulently. This is a very irksome matter, for our friends are candid about our backwardness, and ask indignantly why we fail to mention that Miss — is ugly enough to stop a clock, or that it is a long day's walk round the *jeune premier* at the Footlights Theatre.

Something at least might be done by the managers to help us. They ought to cut the references to the heroine's beauty when it is obvious that she has none. It may be suggested that is this hard upon the plain women who possess the mysterious gift of charm. The answer is that no charming woman is ever plain, even if someone—Voltaire, perhaps—spoke of "*les laides charmeuses*."

The list of difficult points is not exhausted. For the question arises whether one ought to mention at all any acting that is not extraordinarily good or bad. As a rule, mediocrity has to pass unnoticed in this world; in most professions the person whose worth is not above or below the average is rarely mentioned. Why should an exception be made in case of a player? If we know that the performance of Miss X. is no better or worse than would have been that of the average actress, why should we torture our brains to find adjectives concerning her?

Perhaps in dealing with this, attention ought to be drawn to the fact that the point really relates almost exclusively to criticisms of new plays. When *Hamlet* is given, or any other classic drama, by a queer twist one finds in fact that from a journalistic point of view the performance is of more importance than the piece. We are not expected to add to the intolerable mass of matter already written about the Prince; nobody cares twopence what we write concerning the play, since we have nothing to say that has not been said already, and by more important people; and the curiosity of the public in this case relates only to the acting and the setting.

The Circumstances under which he Writes

A little while ago the critic of an evening paper received a letter partly in the following words:—"I am deeply grateful to you, but for you, I should not have known that Réjane made a speech at the end of *La Souris*. Such morning papers as I saw said nothing about it. Things have changed sadly, you see. I write slowly, and I hate last acts; they always spoil a play. I noticed that a little while ago you suggested that it might be a good idea to begin a play with the last act; the idea is a mere *hysteron-proteron*, absolutely preposterous, prae-post-erous." This sounds as if the writer were the ghost of De Quincey.

"In the past I got my morning paper early enough to be able to send down to the office a correction of any error in my conjectural notice of the last act, and reception of the play, or even a report of the speech at the end; and if the theatre had been burnt down, or the leading player had fallen in a fit, I would have sent an account of it, so as not to lose my berth for apparent inattention to business. There are editors who think that they can get critics strong enough to sit out the whole of a play. Now, alas! the morning papers do not help me."

Certainly there was a curious and pathetic humour about his position, for one of the features of the modern journal is that the more "up-to-date" the paper the staler the news. Once upon a time the ordinary daily went to press at about half-past one; but now the printer's devil is at rest after midnight in some of these offices, and several terrifically modern morning papers, a copy of which you can read with your breakfast at Timbuctoo, are completely printed before the extra-special edition of the evening paper of the (nominal) day before is sold out. The last statement may only be applicable to the country editions, by which the yokels are deceived.

The result is strange so far as the theatre is concerned, for on an important occasion even a writer with such a rapid pen as that of Clement Scott needed the full time-allowance of the old system. The consequence is seen in two sets of announcements. According to one, there is to be a *répétition générale* of several forthcoming plays, which, in plain English, means an anticipatory performance to a private audience, given in order to assist the critics—or some of them—in carrying out their duties and fighting the clock, and perhaps also for the purpose of giving seats to some of the swagger "deadheads" who crowd the stalls on a first night.

The other announcement was by Sir Herbert Tree, that his coming first night was to begin at seven o'clock, in order that we might have leisure on the same evening for the performance of our tasks. The representatives of the morning papers have a melancholy choice between having no time to dine and no time to write.

Perhaps the *répétition générale* system will come into vogue, but it has disadvantages. For years it was worked at the Savoy during the days of that theatre's vitality; but the public rehearsal was a real rehearsal, with three rows of stalls left empty for the to-and-fro of people directing the performance, and scenes were acted over again and songs resung. A procession in *Utopia Limited* was sent back half-a-dozen times because it did not reach a particular position on the stage at the right moment.

Répétitions of this character—and, it may be, of any character—are not wholly satisfactory to the critic. There is a sham-fight air about them—a good many of the players cannot work themselves up to the full fury of real combat; they are affected by the fact that the affair is not exactly genuine. One can even imagine that some of them say to themselves, "It will be all right on the night," and justice is by no means restored even if the critic afterwards sees the first public performance. The dress rehearsal has left him somewhat unfairly cold, because the circumstances were hostile, and in most cases a second dose of the affair within twenty-four hours makes him colder still, since, unless the work is the rare masterpiece, he does not wish to see it twice within a space of less than forty-eight hours, or years. No doubt the public will get the benefit of the

critic's views as to the nature of the reception, since, having already written his notice, which he is not likely to alter in the least degree so far as impressions of the piece and acting are concerned, he will have plenty of time for a last paragraph about the "boos" or cheers and the non-appearance of the author or the speech.

There was even a third announcement, for the critic of the paper lovingly called *The Tizer* by the members of the industry whose interests it protects with the utmost vehemence of laborious alliteration stated that in the future his first-night notices would only contain an account of the plot and reception, to which presumably were to be added the words *Cur adv. vult*—let us hope there was no misunderstanding as to the middle word—whilst a day later his considered judgment was to be given.

Certainly this method is not quite a novelty, and has often been recommended. Probably the reason why it has not hitherto been adopted has been the repugnance to it of the critics, based on a sneaking belief that the public does not take enough interest in criticism of the drama to read the second notice, on which, of course, the writer would have bestowed the greater labour.

There is something very human in the belief; few of us have sufficient self-confidence to fancy that the public does more than glance at a notice to discover what sort of piece it deals with, and whether it was well received, and is the sort of thing the reader wants to see; and we fear there is only a very small percentage that pays any attention to our finest phrases, aptest quotations, and subtlest evidence of acquaintance with the easy aids to universal knowledge.

Indeed, we have a humiliating certainty that our friends would never get beyond the account of the plot and the reception and remarks about individual performers in whom they happen to take particular interest, friendly or otherwise. Moreover, it is to be noted that the public has come to doubt the value of the first-night receptions which we record, the fact being incontestable that a good deal of the applause is quite unreal.

Perhaps an advantage of the *répétition générale* system will be that if the managements can only persuade their friends that it is more *chic* to be at the *répétition* than the first performance we shall have genuine audiences at *premières*, whose verdict will be of real weight.

There are certain difficulties about the new system. The invitation performance is an admirable means for the manufacture of enmities: to classify one's friends into boxes, stalls, dress circle, etc., is no doubt to have a delightful opportunity of snubbing people, but it is sure to breed bitter quarrels; whilst on the other hand, to let the guests shift for themselves creates no little trouble and imposes a very difficult task upon the attendants. It sounds easy under such circumstances to reserve places for the critics, but unless they come a long time in advance they are not likely to get them.

His Fear of Libel Actions

Some while ago—it was in 1902-1903—the critics were aghast—editors, too, perhaps. Mr Justice Ridley had permitted a jury to give £100 as damages for libel in respect of a dramatic criticism less severe than dozens that most of us have written: it was said that some critics consulted their solicitors as to the best means of rendering their property "judgment proof"—a picturesque term that comes from America.

Later on the Court of Appeal interfered effectively, though possibly many actions were begun and settled before the appeal was heard; and it was held that in a libel action founded upon a criticism written concerning a work of art, unless there is some evidence of malice it is the judge's duty to consider whether the criticism can fairly be construed as being outside the range of fair comment, and if he thinks that the comments lie within the range of criticism he should decide the case in favour of the defendant, and not let it go to the jury. Then the critics breathed again, and the story goes that Fleet Street laid in a large stock of vitriol.

The next, and at present last, act in the matter was the recovery by Mr Frederick Moy Thomas of £300 damages for a libel which appeared in *Punch* upon his book called "Fifty Years of Fleet Street." Although the matter related to a book, and not to a play, the dramatic critics felt anxious again, because no distinction could be drawn between criticisms upon the two kinds of work. The case was peculiarly interesting to the dramatic critics because the plaintiff, who had been one of our craft for some length of time, enjoyed the reputation of being very learned in matters connected with the drama, as well as sound and conscientious.

Moreover, his father, William Moy Thomas, whose name was introduced into the case, was for many years past one of the most esteemed and admired of our profession, owing to his knowledge, fairness, judgment and excellence of style. The Court of Appeal upheld the verdict, and *Punch's* record of long existence without a verdict against it for libel is spoilt. Its licence, the licence of a nation's jester, has been endorsed.

It may be asked whether this is not a mere matter for the craft: in reality the public is concerned. The letter written by one friend to another, gossiping about a play or a book or a picture, exposes the writer to an action for libel unless it can be protected on the ground of truth, privilege or fair comment; and casually written remarks concerning any matter of public interest may result in damages and costs. Indeed, to put the matter simply, the professional critics have no greater rights or privileges of criticism than any member of the public. It is therefore very important to all of us to know how the matter stands, and since the judgment of the Master of the Rolls is rather technical, it seems worth while briefly to state the law in unscientific phrases.

The written opinion upon any matter of public interest—a play, a book, a piece of music, a picture, the speech of a politician, the sermon of a parson, the behaviour of a general, the conduct of an admiral, the methods of a judge, etc.—must fulfil two conditions. It must be honest and it must be expressed fairly in the point of form. In the "Ridley" action the honesty of the opinion was admitted, and the question arose whether the opinion was fair in form. In the famous Whistler *v.* Ruskin cause there was no doubt about the critic's

honesty—fancy doubting Ruskin's honesty! However, the jury thought that he went too far in his phrase "nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture," and probably the word "coxcomb" was fatal, for it was irrelevant.

It might almost be said that relevancy is the test of fairness in the form of a criticism. It was irrelevant as well as inaccurate to speak of a "naughty wife" in a criticism upon *The Whip Hand*, because there was "no naughty wife" in the play, and therefore the jury gave one shilling damages and the Court of Appeal upheld the verdict.

In criticism of a book, play, picture, etc., the private life and character of the author are irrelevant; even his character as author, except in relation to the particular work or works criticized, is irrelevant. If you think that a book or play is immoral or indecent, say so, say so strongly, and if the criticism, though unsound, represents your honest opinion you will escape; but it is irrelevant to say that the author caused it to be immoral or indecent in order to obtain a *succès de scandale*, and you must prove that charge to be true or be punished. There is a distinction between alleging that Smith's book, "The Biography of Brown," is dull, and that Smith is a writer of dull books—*ex pede Herculem* would not be a valid plea.

If honest and discreet in language you may be abominably incorrect in opinion. You are at liberty to say that a composition by Strauss is a mess of hideous sounds, that one of Sargent's pictures is ridiculous, that a novel by Meredith is tiresome, but you must be very careful, when criticizing a particular work, if you make general allegations concerning the author. Nevertheless, it is permissible to criticize the works of a dramatist generally upon a reasonable opportunity; yet there is a danger of your getting into trouble on the point of honesty, for it is not honest to comment upon his works generally unless you are well acquainted with them.

To sum up: if the opinion expressed is honest and relevant, then mere unsoundness of judgment will not hurt you. The opinion of the jury, or even of the judge, is not to be substituted for yours, otherwise we should have to burn our pens. There is sense in this. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, and even the learned judge, may have less knowledge of art, or less taste in music, than the starving critic of Fleet Street.

Honesty is the other element. Yet it has been suggested, though unsuccessfully, that honesty is not a necessary ingredient in the defence of "fair comment." It was argued that a criticism, defensible if written by an honest critic, could not be indefensible because written by one whose motive was malicious—in other words, that the matter was objective, not subjective. Certainly, at first sight, it seems strange that A can say with impunity that Smith's book is dull and B may have to pay damages for saying the same thing in the same words. Clearly the injury to the author may be the same in each case, might be greater in A's if he wrote for a paper of larger circulation than the one which published "B's" criticism.

On the other hand, few acts can be regarded in law from the point of view of their consequences only. Smith may be killed by "A" or "B," and the former, on account of the circumstances, may commit non-culpable homicide, the latter murder.

To eliminate the ingredient of malice or, and it is the same thing, to say that a criticism need not be honest might lead to shocking consequences. The skilful craftsman would be able to write a fiendish criticism with impunity and boast of the gratification of his hatred. There is no half-way house. A plaintiff must be entitled to offer evidence to a jury that the so-called critic has stated that, although he called the plaintiff's book dull and clumsy, he really thought it a delightful masterpiece; or he must be limited to inviting judge and jury to study the defendant's article. Who would be satisfied that justice had not slept if such evidence were excluded?

If, then, you dislike the author, dip your pen in honey rather than in vinegar or, wiser still, leave his work alone. You must be more than human not to be biassed and if, to contradict the bias, you praise the book against your judgment, you act wrongly as a critic. What is honesty? There is the crux. Courts of law are but man-made machinery and very imperfect, juries are often very stupid, even judges—but perhaps we ought to pause here. Consequently, if the author has any grounds for suggesting that you are ill-disposed towards him, and yet you must act as critic (amateur or professional), be scrupulously relevant and decidedly colourless. At present the honesty has not been analysed by the courts; some day the question will be raised whether competence is not a necessary ingredient. Could a Gautier who hated music *honestly* criticize a symphony; could a blind man *honestly* criticize a picture? These are extreme cases, and a line must be drawn somewhere. Still, some day the courts may require the defendant to give evidence of his fitness to act as a critic if his fitness be challenged. To these remarks one obvious matter should be added. All statements of fact in a criticism must be accurate. The line between matters of fact and matters of opinion is sometimes fine, but the law is clear. An allegation of fact is not comment, and all such allegations, if injurious, must be justified—that is—proved to be true, if the defence of fair comment is pleaded.

CHAPTER II

THE DRAMATIC CRITIC

His Duty to be Tolerant

Some remarks which appeared in a popular weekly paper concerning Mrs Patrick Campbell's *Deirdre* and *Electra* deserve a little consideration. One of the critics attached to the paper spoke of the affair as being an "indifferent performance of indifferent tragedies," and then said it was "a simple affectation to profess to enjoy it," and that it was not, "as some people seem to think, a mark of culture, but only of insufficient culture not to acknowledge that one is bored by this kind of thing."

An affronted critic wrote to the paper, complaining of the charge of affectation and insufficient culture, and was promptly rebuked as a "bumptious correspondent," and told that his letter convinced the critic that he was one of those affected persons whose misdirected zeal the writer deplored. This attitude is not a novelty. Many of the critics, at one period, charged the professed admirers of Wagner with being impostors or imbeciles; later on, anyone who professed to like the pictures of Whistler or Rossetti or Burne-Jones, or of any of the Impressionists, was accused of affectation. When Ibsen was introduced to England the conservative critics raved, and alleged that the Ibsenites (or "Obscenites"—the word was considered very witty) were humbugs; this was one of the least offensive charges. The same kind of thing happened in the case of Maeterlinck. Many other instances might be cited.

It is a curious form of attack. Why should a critic who alleged that he had much pleasure and certainly no boredom from Mr Yeats' play and Mrs Campbell's beautiful acting, be charged with affectation and also with insufficient culture? Of course, the critics are insufficiently cultured. There are thousands of plays and books that they ought to have read, of dramas they ought to have witnessed, of pictures they ought to have seen, masses of music they ought to have heard—and have not—and, therefore, they are persons of very insufficient culture. But the writer in question should offer some evidence of his own sufficiency of culture before alleging that the critic's opinion concerning the play and the performance was due to a lack of culture.

After all, one would seem entitled to express an opinion on a question of art or pleasure without being called a liar by someone who takes a different view. The matter is one of some importance because the attack is insidious and dangerous. The deadliest weapon in the hands of the critic is the allegation of boredom. You can say that a piece is vulgar, indelicate, inartistic, indecent, full of "chestnuts," old-fashioned, "melodramatic," ill-constructed or unoriginal, without doing fatal injury, but if you allege that you and everybody else suffered from boredom your attack may be fatal. This is the reason why the charge is so often made by people with strong prejudices.

There is something to be said on both sides. No doubt the lovers of the severer form of drama, the worshippers of Shaw, the playgoers who supported the societies of which the Independent Theatre was the first and regarded the Court Theatre for a while as a kind of Mecca, are not always judicious when talking about musical comedy and comic opera, and some of them have been very narrow-minded. They have refused to admit the merit of any comic operas, except those of Gilbert and Sullivan, they have lavished indiscriminating abuse upon almost all others, have looked upon Daly's Theatre and the Gaiety and the Prince of Wales' as so many Nazareths. This, of course, has caused a great deal of annoyance to the lovers of musico-dramatic work.

Moreover, some of the austere folk have denounced melodrama and farce, and the so-called romantic comedy, without drawing nice distinctions. This indiscriminate denunciation has naturally caused annoyance and reprisals. Because some critics disliked *A Chinese Honeymoon* enormously, because wild motor 'buses could not drag them to see *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, they do not doubt, or pretend to doubt, that hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people have enjoyed these pieces. Without for one moment believing in the phrase "De gustibus non est disputandum" as ordinarily interpreted, one must fully recognise that palates differ. If M. Steinheil chose to dine upon cold pork-pie, sausage, cold veal and lobster as the papers allege, it is not surprising that he died, only a little amazing that the French police were puzzled as to the cause of his death, but there was no reason for charging him with affectation in eating such a meal or insufficient culture, though it was hardly the banquet of a gourmet. One may pull a wry face at a costly *Bouillabaisse chez Roubillon* at Marseilles without doubting that poor old "G.A.S.," and Thackeray too, loved the dish. Some prefer homely beer to any of the white wines of the Rhine, yet many people honestly enjoy those high-priced varieties of weak-minded vinegar; and no doubt it is not affectation which causes some people to allege that they like black pudding and tripe and onions.

The matter has its serious aspect. The attacks made, very unfairly, upon the novel forms of drama by conservative critics, when they take this form of alleging that not only the critic but the audience was bored, and that professed admirers are insincere, undoubtedly are very effective, and certainly are sometimes made in good faith.

There are people so foolish as to think that nobody can like what they do not; also so fatuous as to consider that no one ought to like what they do not; but to jump from this to alleging that the professed admirers of ambitious works are humbugs is outrageous. The butcher boy enjoys *Sweeney Todd, the Barber of Fleet Street*: why should he disbelieve my statement that others get pleasure from a performance of a *Hedda Gabler*, which would hardly appeal to him?

Large numbers of playgoers have been kept away from able and ambitious dramas, written by dramatists with a true artistic aim, because of the oft-repeated allegations by newspaper writers, who did not like them, that everybody was bored; also the wholesale denunciation of the lighter forms of dramatic and musico-dramatic forms of entertainment by some of the critics has weakened their influence, has led the man in the street to think that if Mr X. or Y. or Z. can find no pleasure in what he likes that he will get no entertainment from what they admire. One supposes, at least hopes, that dramatic critics of all kinds and grades have an honest desire for the advance and success of British Drama. They will hardly be successful in their wishes unless on each side a little more tolerance is shown for the opinions professed by members of the other.

In some criticisms on certain demi-semi-private performances given in London by a well-known French actress and her company there seemed to be a note not often discoverable in English articles dealing with the theatre. It appeared as if several of the writers had a kind of fierce exultation in the thought that the play represented was likely to shock a good many people—people presumably entitled to have their feelings considered seriously. In the annals of English art there has been rather a scanty exhibition of the desire to do what may be most easily described by two French phrases, "*épater le bourgeois*" or "*ébouffier le bourgeois*."

It is, in fact, noticeable that we possess no recognised English set phrase, such as "to startle the Philistine" or "to ruffle the hair of the Philistine." Indeed, before Matthew Arnold imported the term Philistine from Germany, as equivalent in art matters to the French "*le bourgeois*" or the later expression "*l'épicier*," we really had nothing at all to correspond with these terms. For to shock "Mrs Grundy" is quite off the point. This is the more remarkable because the *bourgeois* feeling—treated, by the way, admirably in Balzac's short story "Pierre Grassou"—has long been the curse of English art, and, as represented by the Royal Academy, still remains a paramount power for evil.

It cannot be said that the desire to "*ébouffier le bourgeois*" often leads to valuable results so far as the works intended to accomplish the feat are concerned, although it is possible that some of them have otherwise had a beneficial result. Another French phrase, "*pour activer la digestion*," contains a hint that such an attempt may indirectly render service to art. Our popular ideas of medical treatment have never adopted the theory suggested by the foreign phrase, which is that when the digestive apparatus is sluggish it is advisable to eat something violently indigestible so that the stomach, summoning all its forces to deal with the intruder, may be aroused to a state of activity. This is a kind of theory to be tried on the dog—not your own dog, of course.

Yet it may be that an occasional slap in the face of the public in respect of artistic matters awakens it from the complacent state of lethargy in which it lies with regard to most questions of art.

The young English dramatist has very few opportunities of making the hair of the Philistine stand on end or activating his digestion; he is worse off than the youthful British painter who, as those that have haunted the English studios and the ateliers on the Surrey side of the Seine well know, can give a kind of birth to his insults to the taste of the churchwarden. Once down upon canvas a picture is at least half-alive, whilst nothing is more pitifully dead than the audacious play in manuscript.

The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre gave to French revolutionaries in dramatic art the chance of setting the Seine on fire, but the Censor has allowed our playwrights little scope. The evasion of his authority by means of nominally private performances has brought into brief life on the boards very few pieces in my time in which one can really see evidence of the youthful desire to shock the Philistine. In *Ghosts*, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, and *Monna Vanna*, though all three were prohibited by the authority, there is no sign of the particular element in question. The first two are serious, sober studies of social problems, not intended to shock or startle but to educate the orthodox. The prohibition of the third was simply an official blunder in relation to a dignified work of art.

On the other hand there is a trace of the spirit in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, and *Salome* seems full of it. Curiously enough, in some of the permitted dramas by Mr Bernard Shaw there is evidence of this desire. Mr Shaw often seems to be saying, "I'm going to make your flesh creep." He is a brilliant dramatist, and also, desperately in earnest, and it may well be that they are right who think that his plays will live along after the death of most English works produced since the public and critics were bewildered at the first performance of *Widowers' Houses*, and he certainly appears to adopt as a policy the theory of stirring up into activity the lethargic stomach of the British playgoer by devices carefully calculated to make him howl.

Salome stands in another category: the author had no lesson to teach. As a work of art his play would not be invalidated or even weakened if, instead of the biblical characters and phrases, he had invented his prophet, slightly altered time and place, and left out the quotations; but to have done this would have been to avoid shocking people. Of course it is not always easy to be certain whether an audacity is employed with the desire to "*ébouffier le bourgeois*" that may be excusable, or with the object of beating the big drum and calling attention, ignobly, to the existence of a work which, but for such means of publicity, might have remained unnoticed. In the case of *Salome* it is hard to guess to which of these two motives one ought to ascribe the choice of treatment made by the lamentable man of genius who illustrated the truth of the theory advocated by the late dramatic critic of *The Times* in his work "The Insanity of Genius."

Such audacities often deceive the youthful critic, and, in some of the notices referred to, the signs of youth are manifest in the ill-balanced enthusiasm, as well as in the employment of phrases of praise which the old hand shirks with a curious kind of bashfulness.

In criticism there is a difficulty analogous to that which is supposed to beset the performance of the part of Juliet; it is rather nicely put in the title of one of Béranger's poems—and also of a rather dreary, once popular, novel, "Si Jeunesse Savait, si Vieillesse Pouvait." In youth one has intense sympathy with the lost causes, or, rather, with those that have not yet been found, and superb contempt for the conventional, without possessing the judgment to distinguish the tares from the wheat; every novelty attracts, every audacity appeals, and we introduce obscure artists of alleged genius by the dozen to an unsympathetic world; as age and judgment come enthusiasm wanes, till at last the inevitable crystallization begins and new ideas beat vainly at the doors of our minds.

Even before the crystallization has become serious it is very hard to appreciate the rare novelties of idea offered in our theatres; weariness of stale conventions which affects the young critic in a less degree than the old, does not easily induce one to accept mere outrages upon them. *Salome*, indeed, has some outrages upon stale conventions, but they are rather stale outrages.

Certain French comedies have reduced unconventionality in morals to a kind of spurious conventionality; in

some of them the idea of marriage as a preliminary to connubial relations is regarded as rather shocking. Some day Madame Granier will hide her face in her hands, shameful at the insult of "married woman" hurled at her; and our youthful critic will admire the audacity. Caution requires the statement that it was not Madame Granier who gave the semi-demi-private performances: honesty compels one to admit that these remarks constitute a moan about lost youth, and are full of envy, hatred and malice towards those blessed with splendidly indiscreet enthusiasm for flaunting audacity in artistic matters.

The Jaded Critic

At this, the season of the country cousin, the gift and sometimes receipt of game, the abandonment of autumn underclothing and the overhauling of pike tackle, a question is often put to the critic. It comes from the country cousin, and is generally in these words or thereabouts: "What piece ought we to take tickets for?" which generally has an under-surface suggestion, and might be translated into: "For what theatre are you going to get us seats?" Of course we are dense enough not to notice that the inquiry is more than skin-deep; the question of "paper" for the critics is not one concerning which it is necessary or desirable to write. The answer to the surface inquiry generally provokes a discussion. In a guarded way the critic makes a reply containing the formula "I think you would like ——" which does not altogether please the inquirer. For the country cousin suspects the existence of a lurking insult to him upon the point of taste or intelligence.

The end of it is always, or nearly, the same, and to the effect that of course we "jaded critics" do not really care about any pieces at all, and only visit the theatre because we are paid to go, and that it is awfully unfair that such "jaded"—one cannot help insisting upon the word "jaded"—people should be allowed to act as critics. It has been suggested bluntly that we ought to be dismissed after fifteen years' labour, and of course, if there were a pension—but then we are no better off in that respect than county-court judges.

Yet even the cleverest country cousin cannot suggest any useful employment for superannuated, middle-aged dramatic critics.

No doubt we have been advising our cousins quite wisely as to what is likely to please them, for if we learn nothing else by our labour we certainly get to know what kind of play and performance is to the taste of other people.

Sometimes one asks oneself what truth there is in the jaded critic theory. It cannot be pretended that a man who goes to the theatre three times or so a week pays each visit in the hopeful state of mind or with the expectation of intense enjoyment possible to those who only patronize the playhouse now and then and pick their pieces. Indeed, he very often sets out with the knowledge that he is going to pass a dull evening. If he is unable to guess that, his experience will have told him little and his capacity is small. Moreover, he cannot be expected to take such pleasure in the average play as if his visits were rare, and what has been said about the play necessarily applies to the acting.

Sometimes when watching a work of common quality, a painful idea comes into one's mind, and we wonder how people, compelled to see it night after night perhaps for half-a-year, can endure the strain. What, for instance, must be the sufferings of the conductor or of a member of the orchestra at a successful second-rate musical comedy; of a stage manager compelled for months, one after another, to direct a brainless farce? Of course the people lumped together in the technical term as "the front of the house" have a remedy, and after the first night or two only appear in the auditorium when the curtain is down, or, to be more accurate, just before it descends, when all hands are expected to be on deck.

There are critics that resemble the person who denied that any beer could be bad, and would sooner pass an evening in a theatre watching a mediocre play acted in a style no better than it deserves than at home in a well-stocked library. They resemble the journalist in a story by Balzac who, when blind, haunted a newspaper office and revelled in the smell of printers' ink, and they have been known for their own pleasure to pay a second visit to a piece on which they wrote a condemnatory criticism. In fact, they have the curious mania for the theatre which induces many people with no talent for acting to abandon comfortable careers and starve on the stage—or at the stage door.

That the critic's sufferings in the playhouse are considerable is incontestable, and they are keener at the performance of works of mediocrity than when watching very bad plays. Fortunately there are two sides to every hedge. When the play has any touch of originality, or even novelty, our pleasure is far keener than that of the unsophisticated, and we often perceive originality or novelty where the public notices none. A whole field of enjoyment is open to us in the triumphs of technique which is almost untrodden by the general public. Our poles of pain and pleasure are farther apart than those of the Man in the Street. There have been pieces and performances concerning which the praise of the critics, or some of them, has seemed mere raving to the ordinary playgoer. Several actors and actresses whom we prefer to some of the popular favourites have been banished from London by the indifference of Londoners, and there are "stars" beloved in the theatres who irritate the observant because they have never learnt their art, and nevertheless triumph by mere force of personality.

No doubt the critics, so far as acting is concerned, often—very often—fall into an error and censure acting which does not move them yet impresses the audience, forgetting that it is the advantage and disadvantage of the actor that he need only affect, and must affect, those before him, and that to move only a minority of a normal audience is to act badly. One may write but cannot act for posterity, and therefore the actor, the pianist, the violinist, and the like should not be grudged their noisy, obvious demonstrations of admiration.

Does the critic really get jaded? Is it unfair that the "jaded" critic should deal with the average play? In answering the latter question one should consider whether the notices of the younger critics, too fresh to have become jaded, are more valuable than those of the veterans. Perhaps the two questions should be treated together.

Most critics do get jaded. The critic is jaded when he is saturated with theatrical impressions and cannot take up any more, when new pieces merely recall memories of old pieces or are disliked and distrusted because they do not. After a certain age, varying with the individual, all, or almost all, of us gradually move towards a condition of repugnance to new ideas—a repugnance that becomes hatred when they are inconsistent with the old theories that have grown to be part of ourselves as well as of our stock-in-trade; and when this movement has gone far we are "jaded," are unfit to estimate the value of new ideas; we are still competent to apply the old theories to plays and acting based on them, but of course cumber the ground and retard progress. In youth, having few theories of our own or that have cost us enough labour in acquirement to seem very precious, we tend to be over-hospitable to new ideas and accept dangerous guests.

The notices of the veterans, even of the jaded, upon the average work are sounder, as a rule, than those of the young hands, because the latter very often mistake things merely new to them for things actually new, and they are kinder for the reason that the writers know how great are the difficulties in the way of writing plays from a novel standpoint and of getting them produced when written. There is less violence in their views.

Happy the critic during the years when he is old enough to be cautious about accepting new ideas and young enough to be enthusiastic concerning them after careful consideration, when he is so mature as not to desire to stagger the orthodox by the impudence of his opinions, and sufficiently youthful to be willing to shock the conservative by the audacity of his views. He may then seem jaded because he is not easily moved, but will be quicker to give encouragement to sincere effort, to perceive talent imperfectly manifested, and to appreciate technical triumphs than when he was younger and yet able to welcome novel ideas even if they assail cherished theories.

His Unpaid Labours

Probably many of the craft have wasted a good deal of the last few first-nightless weeks in the trying task of reading plays, not the printed plays by dramatists of reputation, but the manuscripts with which we, or some of us, are flooded. It is hard to guess why strangers should assume that we are willing to spend our time in reading their plays, but they do. Some apparently deem it to be part of our duties, and even believe that there exists a Government fund which pays our expenses of postages and stationery, for many of the amateur authors make no provision for the return of their work. Occasionally there comes a suggestion that we are really conferring no favour because the pleasure of reading the play will pay for our pains. Some imagine us to be agents for the managers. Even the proposal to pay a commission if we place the piece is not rare; now and then it is wrapped up gracefully, but frequently is expressed in the bluntest fashion.

Upon consideration of the batch lately waded through several things stand out. Firstly, most of them exhibit no trace of cleverness; so far as one can see the writers are people without any gift at all for writing—but for writing anything—but are ordinary commonplace people who, unless their conversation is more brilliant than their written matter, would not be considered clever by their friends in everyday life.

They write farces or comedies, in an orthodox form, which contain a surprisingly small number of jokes or efforts at wit and humour. Their works have the air of being mere preliminary plays—the playwrights apparently have set out scenes and written dialogue intended to indicate the nature of the proposed piece with the view afterwards not, indeed of polishing, for there is nothing to polish, but of rewriting, putting in the vital passages during the process. One cannot offer any useful advice to these people, save that of suggesting they should turn their attention to gardening or golf. They have only one fault, and it is that they have no quality. Such writers, as a rule, have at least one small quite useless virtue—their pieces are not ridiculously unsuitable in point of form for the stage.

A more interesting class consists of authors who possess some talent and no idea how to use it. They write comedies which have some clever passages, some lines witty enough to deserve a laugh, and exhibit capacity in character-drawing, but are not at all in an acceptable form. A comedy in six acts, with twenty scenes, would not be considered for a moment by a modern manager.

We have returned in a curious way to something like the ideas underlying "the unities"; perhaps that statement is incorrect, but, at least, we have put upon our dramatists certain working laws almost as embarrassing as the unities. The average playgoer has no idea of the skill involved in writing the ordinary successful comedy of the present time.

The modern dramatist has nothing approaching the licence of his predecessors. Construction was comparatively easy in the time of a Sheridan or a Goldsmith; not only were they allowed to use explanatory dialogue, in which A told B a number of things which B knew already, because the author desired the audience to learn them; but they were permitted to give direct statements of fact in soliloquies. Such licence has gone: asides are dead, statements of fact in soliloquies are only permitted in formal tragedies. Moreover, having the right to make almost an unlimited number of changes of scenery, they were enabled to present in action the facts which in our days have to be told to the audience in dialogue—dialogue written under severe limitations. In consequence, the mechanical difficulties of construction were then very small. Nowadays, except in the case of melodrama, complicated stories have to be told in three or four acts, with no change of scenery during an act.

Let anyone who doubts whether this creates a difficulty take an ordinary famous old comedy and rewrite it in a form in which it would be accepted as a new play by a London manager, and he will find the difficulty enormous. To the youthful dramatist this exercise is very valuable means of studying the art of construction. When, unassisted by the work of former adapters, he has succeeded in converting half-a-dozen eighteenth-century comedies into three or four act comedies, without any changes of scenery during an act, and has used all the matter of the old comedies in his versions and yet avoided the employment of the soliloquy, or the

aside, or the explanatory dialogue in which A tells B what B knows already, he will have learnt a great deal of his craft. This explanatory dialogue is the sort of passage in which a son reminds his mother of the date of his birth, and the profession of his father, and of the period when she sent him to school and so on.

It may be doubted confidently whether a change of style, which has increased so enormously the practical difficulties of writing acceptable plays, has been beneficial to drama. There are writers with wit and a sense of character who under the freer system of old days might have produced successful plays, but are never able to acquire the mechanical skill now demanded, and are kept off the stage by artificial regulations, some of them not based upon essential ideas of drama but in reality upon questions connected with scenery.

One cannot have many changes of the elaborate scenery nowadays employed in comedy, and the illusion sought and to some extent obtained by these costly, complicated sets makes the very useful carpenter's scene impossible. It often happens that incongruities and absurdities in modern plays are due to desperate efforts to overcome these difficulties. Scenes take place in the drawing-room that ought to have been out of doors; things are said that should have been done; and there are long passages of dialogue where short scenes of action would be preferable.

In a large number of cases the manuscripts we read are unacceptable because the authors have not complied with these requirements of the modern stage; and it is impossible for us, with the best will in the world, to reconstruct the works. We can only point out, regretfully, that they do not comply with these modern regulations, and we know quite well that the dramatists will be unable to make the necessary changes. The modern system has had the great disadvantage of putting out of the range of the average writer of comedy a good many subjects that deserve treatment, but can only be handled with success by writers of great experience or those who possess remarkable gifts for the semi-mechanical work of construction, which are not necessarily allied to the higher qualities needed by the dramatist.

Of course, some of the manuscripts are ridiculous: five-act plays that would not last an hour and a half upon the stage and three-act comedies which would require an evening per act; tragedies in rhymed verse not up to the standard of cracker poetry. It is difficult to understand how such things come to be written. The authors must sometimes go to the theatre or read plays, and therefore ought to know that their works are unsuitable, and that they are wasting money in getting their stuff typewritten. Presumably the phenomenon is somehow connected with the curious glamour of the stage. The person who would not dream of trying to cook a chop without some little study of the methods of the kitchen will try to write farce or comedy or tragedy and not deem it necessary seriously to consider the elementary laws governing such works.

His Letter Bag

Possibly the editor sometimes looks with curiosity at the envelopes of letters addressed to a dramatic critic at the editorial office. Let us trust that in the case of those envelopes obviously bearing a lady's handwriting curiosity is not tinged with suspicion. Letters directed to "The Dramatic Editor" are generally American, and contain statements of tremendous importance concerning, as a rule, people of whom one has never heard and requesting the critic to publish them in the next issue of "his" paper.

The documents forwarded by the office are only a tithe of those which come to the critic officially, there being several ways of ascertaining addresses. Many consist of requests to read plays, and exhibit pitifully the strange blindness of parents. A number are almost according to a pattern and run about thus: "DEAR SIR,—Having been a constant reader of your admirable criticisms and sharing sincerely your views about the drama, now, alas! in such a deplorable condition, I feel that there is sufficient sympathy between us for you to be anxious to read the MS. that I enclose and give me your *candid* opinion about it ["candid" is generally underlined], and if you share the opinion that my friends entertain concerning its merits you will perhaps be of assistance to me in getting it brought to the attention of the managers." With this there arrives, unaccompanied by stamps for its return, some work of a hopeless character, often an indifferent specimen of the sort of mechanical farce which, even when good, amuses us little.

Occasionally a romantic drama is received. Once there came a really touching letter from a lady in great trouble on account of want of money, such trouble that she not only failed to enclose stamps for return of her MS. but did not use half enough to frank the heavy packet. She felt sure that the novelty of her plot would make up for any trifling defects due to inexperience. The drama, which was full of "Gadzooks!" and the like, and Roundheads and Cavaliers, concerned Oliver Cromwell and Charles I., and included a plot to rescue the unhappy monarch on the scaffold, which was only frustrated by the direct intervention of "Old Noll," who, after a struggle, used the axe with his own hands. It had seven acts and thirty-three scenes.

We read scores of these pieces, and in most cases our "candid" criticism is not well received. Ere now the reward for the unpaid labour of five or six hours has been a postcard explaining that the author can well understand the deplorable condition of our drama, seeing how incompetent the critics are. There is, of course, another side to the matter. A few pieces—a very small proportion, alas!—have merit, and a few of the authors of the few pieces accept the unpaid critic's remarks reasonably.

Another crop consists of letters from indignant authors or players, which contain argument or abuse, or both. The epistles from authors in some cases are so interesting that it is sad to think we are too obscure to have a biographer who might use them. Those of the players have their humours, particularly when from the aggrieved actresses. One deserves to be mentioned; it stated that, reading between the lines, the lady understood the critic to suggest she was too old for the part of Juliet, and therefore sent a copy of her birth certificate.

It was only a *copy*—there was only *her* word to show that it was a copy of *her* certificate; in the law courts they will not accept your own evidence that you are a minor, even if you bring a certificate issued by Somerset House; they want proof of your being the person named in the certificate. If the letter had

contained a photograph it would have shown that, although alleged to be only twenty-two years old, the lady weighed about 200 lbs., and had a large, flat face, with an inadequate pug-nose.

In a number of cases one is implored to come to the Pier Concert Hall at Flushington-on-Sea, or the like, because, "owing to your appreciative remarks about my performance as the Second Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, I am sure you would like to see my *King Lear*." These give a good deal of trouble, because it is difficult to decline without hurting feelings. Another branch lies in the simple request from people with whom one is unacquainted for introduction to managers whom one does not know.

Fortunately there is another and a pleasanter side. There are letters that we prize, and unfortunately cannot quote, from authors, generally young authors, with thanks for words of encouragement, particularly in relation to unsuccessful work that seemed to have been unlucky; and there are letters from actors and actresses, speaking with gratitude—gratitude unearned, since only duty has been done—for words of praise which have helped to get an engagement or at least to give courage where hope had grown faint. They must be difficult letters to write, since it is clear that the writers generally feel doubtful whether they ought to be written. An ingenious phrase from one of them may be quoted: "I can hardly be taking a liberty in giving a harmless pleasure to a stranger, and I am sure from what I have read of your criticisms that it will be a pleasure to you to know that you have given great comfort and encouragement to one whom you deem worthy of praise."

Last of all are letters from persons who are or profess to be impartial critics of our criticisms, and desire to cause us to change our opinions. An unimportant article—a second-hand article borrowed from Charles Lamb—concerning the effect, on the stage, of Shakespeare's dramas has brought in a respectable revenue to the Post Office, whilst correspondence concerning the wickedness of praising problem plays, however interesting, must have substantially helped some stationers to pay their rent. Fewer but far more exasperating are the epistles in which people express their hearty agreement with opinions which we have never expressed, and give praise and encouragement to us for attacking institutions that we do not think undesirable or defending conduct really deplored by us. Even the obscure are often misunderstood.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAMATIC CRITIC

An Attack upon him

After careful consideration, and almost taking the trouble of rereading some of my little essays, we have failed to discover exactly why the letter set out hereafter was written. Apparently the articles have been a little bitter concerning what some of us call commercial drama, even rather ferocious about a recent crop of plays.

Certainly it seems well that the other side should be heard, that the middle-class sensualist—perhaps "the average hedonist" is a better translation of "*l'homme moyen sensuel*"—should be allowed to express his views; for one is disinclined to attach importance to the Philistine observations in the theatrical trade papers or in the interviews with managers. At the same time, some doubts are possible concerning the letter; it seems to contain some implicit evidence that it was concocted by somebody holding a brief, by a person accustomed to controversy; it is written on the Sports Club notepaper, and merely signed "A Middle-Aged Pleasure-Seeker."

"DEAR SIR,—I have read a great deal about the theatres in *The Westminster Gazette*, signed by 'E.F.S.' I take in the paper because I disagree with its views on all topics—particularly the drama—and I like to hear the other side. Why have you not got a sense of humour? Why do you not cease flogging that dead horse, the British Drama? Do you think you can flog it into life? Do you believe that British Drama, as you understand it, ever did live, or ever will? I don't. There is too much common sense in London.

"Why do you persist in girding at Mr Tree because he gives beautiful scenery instead of what you think fine plays? Lots of people enjoy his entertainments. I don't myself, for I agree with you that Shakespeare and Phillips are tiresome. I notice, by the way, that you even begin to gibe at the scenery and suggest that it is not beautiful because it is too pretty, which is a mere paradox, and of course absurd. Why do you keep howling against melodrama and musical comedy?

"Above all, what grounds have you for supposing that we can have, or ought to have, a drama based upon true observation of life? Every one of us, every day of his existence, is the hero of a drama based upon the true observation of life, and a very tiresome drama too, as a rule, and we all want to see dramas in the theatre that take us out of ourselves. You seem to think that we can and ought to have a drama like the novels of Meredith, which I believe nobody ever reads, or the pictures of Whistler, that are simply ridiculous, or the ugly music of Strauss—I don't mean the one who writes waltzes.

"Even assuming that there are people who like such novels, or pictures, or music, your case is none the better, for ordinary people don't get trapped into being bored by them, and such works can live without general support, whilst drama has to appeal to the bulk of us, and you cannot stick over the proscenium-arch

some phrase such as 'Philistines will be irritated.'

"Of course there are people who think drama ought to be educational, and preach moral lessons, and so on. Well, the popular drama is pretty moral, except, perhaps, musical comedy, which does seem a little topsy-turvy in its lessons; and the Censor prevents politics being introduced or religion being attacked. Every attempt to teach what you would call moral lessons must fall because we know that after all the play is not real. I confess that the romantic and the sentimental rather bore me; but you cannot expect a fifty-year-old stockbroker to be sentimental or romantic. My wife and daughters enjoy that sort of thing, and they simply worship Mr Lewis Waller, of whom I get a bit jealous at times.

"I like the exciting pieces and the funny farces, and all the pretty dresses and pretty undresses and the pretty girls and pretty music of the musical comedies.

"You appear to imagine that the business of the theatre is to make the audience think; perhaps that would be all right if it appealed merely to idle people, but ninety-nine folk out of a hundred who go to a theatre in the evening have already done a day's work; even those who don't earn their living are pretty tired after dinner. So it is clear that there are not people enough to support a drama which it is difficult to understand. Moreover, you forget that when we have to read, as sometimes happens, the high-class books, we can skip the dull parts; indeed, I get to know all that I need about the important books by reading the reviews that tear the guts out of them and merely leave the padding behind; but, unfortunately, you cannot skip the dull parts of a play unless it is a very well-known work, like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, when, if a man has a good seat, he can escape quite a lot of the philosophising passages.

"The solid truth is that we English, like the Americans, have too much good sense to worry about drama. There are a certain number of cranks and faddists who get an unholy delight out of eccentric plays, but they are few in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where good sense reigns. We only take fairy tales seriously when we are children; we never get intoxicated by ideas; this is where we differ from the Continentals. Art is all very well in its way and in its proper place. I like a good picture, or a good song, or a rattling story as well as anybody; but art ought not to be shoved down our throats. You will observe that the Americans, really a great people, are like us in this respect, and none of their plays—at least those that come over here—belong to the intellectual drama about which you rave. When they want to be intellectual they play Shakespeare, not giving us more of the Bard than is absolutely necessary, but letting us have full measure of pretty music, scenery and dresses. Augustin Daly used to do it perfectly.

"By all means have a little theatre of your own and enjoy dull plays in it, but don't denounce our cakes and ale, or think yourself any better than people with healthy tastes who can enjoy such works as *Mrs Dot*, or *The Explorer*, or *The Duke's Motto*. And what does it matter where the plays come from any more than where the nuts come from? Anyone would think you were a rabid Protectionist who reads your howls about imported plays. Art is universal, not local—I read that in some real high-toned book—and if a play is good, don't worry whether its author is French or German or American. You don't grumble if he is Norwegian. Why not? Do be consistent even if you cannot be broad-minded. And, lastly, let the Censor alone; you have flung enough mud at him; I am tired of reading energetic attacks which you know quite well are mere beating of the wind. Your unfortunate reader,

"A MIDDLE-AGED PLEASURE-SEEKER"

It is fair to add that the amiable correspondent is inaccurate in some of his allegations. We have never said that the plays of Shakespeare or Phillips are tiresome, or that Mr Tree's scenery is not beautiful because it is too pretty, but have hinted that it is sometimes too academically or conventionally pretty. And we have not protested against the importation of plays, but against the importation of rubbish no better than our rubbish of a similar character. We have not demanded that all drama should be intellectual, but merely that the intellectual should be given a fair hearing.

Why he is Disliked

It is to be feared that the dramatic critics are not really popular; people have even spoken of them as parasites, without displaying a nice acquaintance with language. On this side of the footlights most people regard us as mere beefeaters, but taste the fare approved by us suspiciously. There is a lurking doubt in the general mind as to our honesty.

The people on the other side know that the "champagne and chicken" idea is ill-founded: perhaps they even regret this occasionally, but they love us none the better. Clement Scott used to be very bitter in print about the ingratitude of players; there was an article by him complaining that those who loved him on account of half-a-dozen laudatory notices turned round and reviled him because of an unflattering phrase in a seventh, and the topic was one upon which he had a means of knowledge quite unequalled. Services weigh less than disservices.

Under such circumstances, mindful of the fact that our remarks are read very closely by people whom they affect deeply, it is most important that our censure should appear just—to others. We ought to be extremely careful that those whom we blame cannot point out that upon their face our remarks are unfair. It is not always easy to remember this, particularly when one is young, and sometimes it is difficult to sacrifice the pleasure of a neat phrase because it may do a little injustice. When looking at such a neat, crushing sentence as "A better company would have been wasted upon such a play, a better play upon such a company," one wonders anxiously whether, in order to write it, the critic may not have been unjust to somebody.

There are dangerous phrases such as this one from a notice upon a play given a little while ago—it runs as follows:—"Mr X. did everything that mortal actor could do for this indifferent comedy. Whenever he had a chance to be funny he was very funny. More than that, he almost made a live figure of a dummy, and that

means that Mr X. did more for his author than his author had done for him." How on earth could the critic know whether his suggestions were true? The play was new; the part taken by Mr X. had never been acted by anybody else; there was no basis for comparison. Obviously there was no foundation for suggesting that from the performance it could be seen that the actor did anything not intended by the author. He spoke the author's text, and nothing indicates that he introduced any "business" unsuggested by him. The piece happens to have been printed for private circulation, so that one can make the assertion confidently.

What means, then, could the writer have of coming to the conclusion that the part, as acted, was any better than the part as written, or that the actor had done more or less than carry out admirably the ideas of the dramatist?

There are instances, of course, where a playwright does owe more to the actor than the actor to him. In *L'Auberge des Adrets*, known in England as *Robert Macaire*, Frédéric Lemaître put the author under an immense debt, perhaps without earning his gratitude, by deliberately converting a turgid, inept, hopeless melodrama into an almost immortal lucrative burlesque. In *Our American Cousin* Sothorn worked up a minor part, that of Dundreary, into something like the whole play, with the result that a piece which might have died in a month lived many years.

It is well known that in certain classes of musico-dramatic pieces the so-called authors expect the leading low comedian to find his own jokes, or most of them, and certainly Mr Arthur Roberts and others have contributed a bigger share of the effective dialogue than that of the persons supposed to have written the book. In such cases the critic has grounds for suggesting that Mr X. "made a live figure of a dummy," and that means that "Mr X. did more for his author than his author had done for him." The case under discussion is quite different. There was nothing to indicate that the actor did more than carry out admirably the very clever ideas of the author—an author, by-the-by, who happens to be very meticulous about having his ideas carried out, and therefore is in the habit of attending rehearsals and expressing his opinion at them. It is regrettable that criticism should be written in this fashion, since it causes a feeling of distrust. Probably the writer had no desire to be unjust, or even unfair in the comparatively venial way of doing rather less than justice to the author in his desire to do rather more to the actor.

It may be urged, by way of answer, that all of us at times are in peril of undervaluing the efforts of the player by suggesting that he has not got full measure out of his part. Perhaps we do occasionally some injustice in this respect; we may imagine that a character ought to act better than it is acted when in fact the author has failed to carry out his intentions, and it is impossible for the player to make the part seem other than that of a dummy. Even in cases where we make such a mistake there may be grounds for the opinion expressed. It cannot be shown *a priori* that our opinion is unjust, though a failure afterwards by several actors of incontestable excellence to give life to the part might prove that we were wrong. In other words, the criticism upon the face of it is fair, and here is its distinction from what is being blamed. Possibly it looks as if the whole matter were one of form; even if this be so, the fact is no answer. In some aspects of life it is more important to seem just than to be just. It is of real moment that nothing should be done to diminish the by no means extravagant weight of dramatic criticism either in the opinion of the public or that of authors and players.

His Honesty

A little while ago there was a meeting of creditors. The debtor was a dramatic critic. There was a great deal of talking. The assets were in inverse ratio to the debts and one creditor, registered under the Moneylenders Act, was very wrathful. Time after time he kept making his suggestion that the debtor was able to get something from his friends wherewith to pay his enemies; and at last, under some pressure, he spoke clearly.

He suggested that as the debtor was still the dramatic critic of an important paper he ought to go and see some of the leading managers and get assistance from them. The speaker was confident that they would gladly advance a substantial sum to a man in the debtor's position without any expectation of direct repayment. What happened after this, of course, was a matter of no importance; but it was interesting and surprising to find a man of business believing that the dramatic critics are easily corruptible, corrupt and corrupted. We are very honest, without being entitled to boast of our honesty; we are like the ladies who from time to time on the stage are bitterly attacked by a heroine with a past. We are ferociously virtuous because we have not been sufficiently charming to be tempted. The phrase "chicken and champagne" still lingers, and I have heard it suggested, in the country, that after the play is over we are regaled by a banquet behind the scenes: "regaled" was the word actually used. It is not difficult to answer that suggestion since most of the critics who count are busily consuming midnight oil, not champagne, as soon as the play is over, and then go to bed tired. Mr Archer, in feigned indignation, once complained that he had never been insulted by the offer of a bribe, and, if my memory is accurate, he even suggested a doubt whether there existed a manager who would lend him half-a-crown! He certainly underrated his weight as well as his value. Yet there is a memorable utterance of a manager to the effect that those of the critics worth bribing could not be bribed, and those willing to be bribed were not worth bribing. Still, there have been instances of efforts. A manager, now no more, once sent an expensive trifle at Christmas to one of us, who, embarrassed by it, indulged in a graceful but rather costly victory by sending a still more expensive trifle to the manager on his birthday, and this closed the incident. Into the nice question whether and how far, apart from anything so vulgar as bribery, we are always strictly impartial I do not care to venture; it may be that even Brutus was sometimes "influenced" without knowing it.

It is painful to be honest and yet suspected. The other day it was brutally suggested that the formation of the Society of Dramatic Critics had some connexion with the coming into force of the Act for the suppression of bribery. Foreigners always presume that we have itching palms, salved in due course by the managers or by the players. Not long ago one of us received a letter from a Continental artist saying that she was about to

appear in London; that for a long time past she had received much pleasure and profit from his articles in *The* —: that she was very anxious that an article concerning her should appear in *The* —; and that if he would be so charming as to arrange it, she would be glad to pay any price—the word "any" was underlined.

No photograph accompanied the letter. No answer came to his reply; probably she was surprised at the attitude adopted by him in referring her to the advertisement manager.

It used to be—perhaps is still—the custom in France for players and dramatists to call upon the critics before or immediately after the *premières*; and not long ago some of the French actresses in London sent their cards to the representatives of the leading English newspapers. The most charitable would guess that these visits to the dramatic critic sometimes influence his notice to an undesirable extent.

It has been said, no doubt untruly, that the rate of pay of the critics of Paris is based in part upon the supposition that their post gives them collateral advantages. In England the popular idea is that the critics are paid vast sums by their editors and also enjoy these little extras.

This idea is possibly the explanation of the fact that editors sometimes get letters from people offering to act as dramatic critics without any salary at all. Apparently the writers of such letters think that the work would be well enough paid for otherwise. Of course they may be merely sufferers from the curious first-night mania which induces a great many people to go to what, as a rule, is the worst but one of the performances of a play. The second, we know, is absolutely the worst, since the performers are suffering from a reaction and fatigue, and there has been no time for improvements to be made in consequence of criticism, amateur and professional. Undoubtedly, in the case of many people, the desire to be present on the first night is merely a snobbish wish to take part in what journalists call "a function," and a large number of first-nighters would attend certain *premières* even if absolutely sure that the performance would be tedious to them. They are present to be seen, and not to see, although nine out of ten of them are of no importance.

The topic is one of delicacy, since everyone is anxious, naturally, not to write anything which could enable his friends to suggest that he is vexed because nobody has attempted to bribe him. The supreme humiliation is for the person who is willing to sin and never gets tempted. It is a little curious, seeing what large sums are at stake, that the new Bribery Act may be regarded as needless so far as we are concerned. In the past there may have been dishonesty; indeed, there was in the case of one or two very well-known critics. The best story in connection with this attempted briber relates to one of the most esteemed of our craft, a writer who has lately retired from the active service of life. A manager sent to him a present of game, and the critic, feeling embarrassed, applied to his editor, Sir John Robinson, for advice. Sir John, who was rich enough in sense of humour, told him that he had better eat the birds promptly in order that corruption might not be added to bribery.

In the fact that, except in rare cases, no efforts are made to bribe London critics there is an agreeable tribute to their honesty. A good many thousands of pounds are at stake; there are not a dozen critics worth bribing; the production budget would only require a small proportionate increase to provide quite a handsome sum to the dozen, yet the offer is not made.

The uncharitable will say that there are not a dozen, or even two or three, worth bribing; yet, although from time to time managers, or rather actor-managers, allege that the critics have little influence, nearly all the managers, actor-managers included, occasionally admit that even if the critics cannot make plays succeed they may be able to kill some.

After all, a failure may be more or less disastrous: the receipts of a piece which runs only three weeks may amount to a thousand pounds more or less; and, using a slightly Irish phrase, the three weeks may be either a fortnight or a month, during which there are gross takings greater or less, while the disbursements are a constant figure. Probably the critics could not kill a production—the word "production" is ugly, but needed to cover both play and performance—which has real elements of popularity in it, assuming that the management has the bold wisdom to run it against bad notices. Moreover, the most amiable criticisms in the world could do no more than mitigate the disaster of an essentially unpopular production.

Some managers place a rather extravagant reliance upon our fairness. Not only do they dissemble their love for some of us, but they even kick us upstairs, and some of us are compelled to pretend that we can see a play better from the dress circle than the stalls. On a first night in certain theatres there are unimportant deadheads in the best seats of the stalls, and the representatives of great English newspapers are hidden behind pillars or put in what, after the first night, will be fourth or fifth rows of the pit, or sent to Coventry in the dress circle—sometimes back rows of it—and one may well feel proud to belong to a craft in the honesty of which the managers have such profound confidence.

There are moments when the thought comes that managers put some of us into very bad seats because they feel that, conscious of unmerited ill-treatment, we will write opinions more favourable than we really hold, for fear lest what we think our true opinions have been unjustly affected by our ill-treatment. Since this was written, one of us heard something quaint about the craft. He was in the torture chair of the dentist, who was talking of the theatres, ignorant of the fact that his victim was a dramatic critic—such is fame—and he spoke about the difficulty of getting tickets for a first-night, and said that most of the seats are given to the press and the only way is to go to the box office on the evening of the first night, since some tickets are generally sold back to the management by the poor hacks anxious to earn a dishonest penny. The sufferer did not contradict him or tell him that most of us get only one ticket and have to use it. You see, no wise man disputes with his "gum architect," who has too many methods of avenging himself if defeated in a controversy. No man is a hero to his dentist.

The sun was on and the fish were off. Strenuous efforts had failed to put the angler in the position of the gentleman *qui peut brâmer ses amis*. Dr Tench, the fresh-water physician, whose medical powers have been somewhat overrated, though he can keep himself alive for an astonishing length of time out of the water, declined the most abominably tempting baits. The pike were only represented by baby jacklets: the rudd and the roach were rare and almost microscopic; as for the carp, of course one did not expect to catch the sly, shy creatures. The friend who had been lured to fish in the big lake, modestly called a pond, put down his rod, and, after a few remarks about the fish, which ought not to be set out in print, said in a meditative way, "I wonder what would happen if there were no dramatic critics." To which came the reply, that there would be no performances, since performances without an audience are almost unimaginable, and every spectator acts to some extent as a dramatic critic.

By the way, it is a curious distinction of the actor's art that he needs an audience more than any other artist. The singer, violinist, and other executants of music, if they really love music, can to almost the full extent of such love enjoy performing to themselves alone as much as before a crowd. The painter and sculptor have a keen pleasure in doing their work and seek no spectator save a model; it is true they desire the world to see the child of their efforts, but that is partly because they are creators, as well as executants. Certainly, the singer would sing for pure pleasure in singing if stranded alone upon a desert island, and marooned men would write books or music if they could, and stranded painters would paint. Would an actor in the position of Robinson Crusoe act to amuse himself—at least, would he do so before he had his man Friday as an involuntary and perhaps ungratified spectator?

The hapless *piscator*—the word ceased to be pretentious after Walton's use of it—refused to bait his hook again, and said, "I mean, what would happen if there were none of you professional chaps who write criticisms that nobody reads except the other dramatic critics?" To remark that if only the critics read criticisms the suppression of criticism obviously would be needless was an easy triumph, so he continued in a grumbling way,

"What I mean is—suppose that after a play you merely gave some sort of account of the plot and did not say whether the piece was good or bad, or proper or shocking, or how it was acted, and so on, would it make any difference? I mean," he added, hastily anticipating a question, "would people go more or less to the theatre, or would the kind of plays and acting change? I suppose it would make a little difference; would the difference be great?"

The answer was "Yes."

After all, the public may award the farthings, but the critics are of weight upon the question of fame; the crowd to some extent acts as jury, the critics are judges; and to pursue the figure, whilst the verdicts are of immediate influence, the judgments remain on record. In the future it will often be difficult to find out what were the verdicts; but there will be no doubt about the judgments. Moreover, whilst, as in the law courts, the verdicts are often due to prejudice and to mere temporary causes, the reasoned judgments, when and so far as reasonable, are based on a firmer foundation.

Probably the theatres would suffer, since there would be less talk about them. For the average Englishman is timid in opinion, and, unless fortified by ideas gleaned from the papers, scamps his conversation on topics concerning which opinions may be expressed. When he has exhausted such subjects as the weather, his health, his private affairs and those of his neighbours, he is accustomed to bestow upon his listeners, in a distorted form, the opinions concerning books, plays, pictures, etc., that he has read in the papers and understood imperfectly; and he certainly would talk far less about plays if he had not the aid of the critic's views.

Of course he would be able to call a piece "awfully good," "simply ripping," "sweetly pretty," "beastly rot," "awfully dull," and to use ill-assorted adjectives concerning the players; but beyond this he would hardly venture for fear of uttering absurdities. A curious humour is that people who have read the opinions which he is misrepresenting, in the papers from which he got them, will listen without patent signs of boredom, and in their turn utter second-hand opinions on similar subjects.

Clearly, then, talk on the topic would languish but for our promptings; and if the theatres were less talked of there would be fewer visitors to them. Furthermore, if there were to be no newspaper criticisms of plays or players, the gossip about them would be diminished even in the papers, for the thrilling personal paragraphs would lose their point if given without adjectives, and adjectives involve criticism of one kind or another.

Would the pieces and performances be affected by the suppression of criticism? Certainly, to some extent. For even if the professional critics tell little more than the amateurs who offer friendly advice, their remarks have a greater weight—partly, indeed, because in a sense they are not gratuitous. All observers have noticed the fact that we rarely act on the opinion of mere friends, however sound. Moreover, no one can deny that when the critics, belonging as they do to many schools of thought and thoughtlessness, agree, they are likely to be correct.

Even putting them on a humbler level, and assuming that some merely express the views of the public, they are serviceable, since the opinions of the world at large are almost wordless, and the author or player unguided save by those immediately around him, and unable to learn more of the public ideas concerning a play or performance than is shown by inarticulate noises and by good or bad houses, would remain curiously ignorant of errors against art and mistakes as to the desires of playgoers.

No doubt, to voice the public's thoughts is not our loftiest task, but it is useful to do so, and there can be no denial of the fact that we know very well what the public likes. It has often been said that we make remarkably bad prophecies as to the fate of plays, but some of the instances quoted are not in point, since they concern works ultimately licked into shape, which, but for the adverse notices, would have remained unchanged till early death ended them.

Real mistakes are made by us in this respect, but generally the mistake is in believing that a piece will be successful which, however, proves to be a failure; we overrate the public taste, or fail to take into account matters quite foreign to the qualities of an entertainment which nevertheless determine its fate.

Of the more important aspect of the critic's mission, his duty in trying to aid in the development of art, the luckless angler was not thinking. Certainly, few, even of those who denounce the critics, will, if they think the matter over, refuse to admit that to the public, the players, and even authors, the humble craftsmen render useful services, quite apart from the value of the work they do for art, by their power of giving voice to the public, whom they study carefully and under favourable circumstances, and by exercising to some extent the function of censor in addition to those of befeater and guide.

The Threatened Theatrical Trust

Somebody has forwarded from America a newspaper article called "The Theatrical Syndicate's Reply to Its Critics," to which is given the signature of Mr Marc Klaw, partner of Messrs Klaw & Erlanger, well-known American managers. During the last few years *The Referee* has been uttering a note of warning about the danger of the establishment in London or England of a theatrical trust. Other papers have handled the subject, and in particular an interview with Mr David Belasco has appeared, in which he explained and vehemently defended his attitude towards the theatrical trust in the United States.

Mr Klaw's article is amusing in its unconscious humour. In one part he denies the existence of certain facts, whilst in another he attempts to show that their existence is beneficial to everybody. The important feature of it is a candid admission that the aims of the syndicate are entirely commercial and that he, one of its principal members, looks upon the theatre from no other point of view than that of business.

"The theatre," he says, "is governed by the rules and observances of all other commercial enterprises. It is not out to dictate to public taste. It is out to satisfy the public demand. While even such a purely business undertaking must be hedged about with essential suggestions of artistic refinement, I do not believe that the public demands of us that we should give over our commercialism. Moreover, the public would have no such right."

There is no need to criticise Mr Klaw's style: still it is rather amusing to think that he sometimes discusses the literary quality of his wares.

If there be any chance of our theatres becoming subject to a syndicate which replies officially to its critics in such a fashion there is serious danger to be considered. Now, according to certain statements by Mr Belasco and by writers in and to *The Referee*, the Theatrical Syndicate does, in fact, control to a very great extent the drama in America, and there is no real doubt about the accuracy of the proposition that the drama in the States is in a worse plight than the drama in London. If, judging by the ordinary picked American productions over here, the evidence were otherwise insufficient, the tone of Mr Klaw's article would render it satisfying.

According to Mr Klaw, the Syndicate has conferred certain advantages upon all persons connected with the theatre—except the critics and the public. He does not venture to put his case any higher than that of a trade combination, and it is clear that he at least does not consider the theatre from the point of view of dramatic art. It is difficult to accept this with equanimity. A phrase of his—"the theatre itself is a business house, exhibiting the pictures of the dramatist and composer under the proper light and most attractive auspices, just as the picture-dealer has a picture-house in which he displays the best efforts of the painters and illustrators"—is based on a curious fallacy.

The picture-dealer will not hurt his business if, in addition to stocking the Royal Academy works, upon which he relies for his bread-and-butter, in the front window, he devotes a little space at the back to the unconventional efforts of the true artists. To do this costs him nothing, and he may even make money by such a policy.

The manager of the strictly commercial theatre cannot follow the picture-dealer's example; he must risk serious loss every time that he produces a non-commercial piece. In one respect Mr Klaw is in agreement with some of the English antagonists of the trust system; like them, he is almost indignant at the idea that the theatre should attempt to educate or dictate to the public. As a corollary, he and they must be opposed to the idea that the dramatist or player should have an educational value. Do they think that the public needs no education in theatrical art? Are they content that the great half-washed should remain in their present condition, which exhibits painfully a great lack of education? Presumably.

Mr Klaw deals with the dramatic critic. Here, of course, our withers are wrung and we write with a bias. He is indignant because the Syndicate is accused of an attempt to "stifle and muzzle" dramatic criticism. He thinks that it is "to his best interests to have it [dramatic criticism] absolutely impartial, absolutely just, and always on the most dignified plane." Then he explains that it is because certain American dramatic critics have fallen from this high standard, or never reached it, that they have been driven from the Syndicate's paradises. Who is to decide whether the critic in a particular case is "absolutely impartial, absolutely just, and on the most dignified plane"? Mr Klaw and his colleagues, of course.

There is a certain fable in which a wolf set itself up to judge the conduct of the relatives of an appetising lamb, and executed a vicarious injustice. From time to time London dramatic critics of the highest standard and most respected character have been excluded by particular managers for a while from their houses, because the managers thought they had not been "absolutely impartial, absolutely just, and on the most dignified plane." Time and their friends have convinced the managers that they had blundered, and peace was made.

Suppose, however, that those individual managers, who really are people taking a far more dignified view of their calling than that of putting it on the level of the dry-goods store, had been part of a syndicate of Klawns, would those critics have been readmitted? Would the fact have been recognized that the unfavourable notices were really honest dignified criticisms, even if disputable upon the point of justice? Of course not. If the newspapers had combined against the theatres, the Syndicate managers would have climbed down. Would they have combined? I think not. Here, indeed, is the peril.

It appears that the Syndicate has already laid its claws on some of the London theatres. What combination is likely to be formed to fight it; and if there be none, what is the inevitable result? In this land, many centuries ago, even before the famous statute of James I. that regulates our Patent Law, the British feeling has been hostile to monopolies. Apparently this spirit was thrown overboard during the famous passage of *The Mayflower*, or when Boston Bay was turned into a teapot, and certainly the American takes everything on trust, except, indeed, the honesty of his rulers and judges. Unfortunately one of the things we are importing from America—would that there were a real prohibitive tariff against it!—is the monopolistic spirit; and this being the case, it is very rash to hope that we shall band ourselves adequately to resist the attacks of the theatre syndicates.

It is easy to see how such a thing would be worked: at the beginning quietly, pleasantly, until the hold became so strong that the gloves could be taken off and players might be warned not to accept engagements from outsiders on pain of getting none from the trust; and dramatists informed that unless they kept all their wares for the Syndicate they must look to the few outsiders for a living. The American managers, in their big way, would buy up some of the irreconcilable newspapers, would acquire a preponderating influence in the neutral, and discover that the critics representing the independent journals were not "absolutely impartial, absolutely just, and always on the most dignified plane." Truly, if we are to be judged by such a method, few, if any, of us will escape a whipping. Does the Syndicate regard any critic who expresses an unfavourable opinion about its wares as "absolutely impartial," etc.? Surely no one who is not "absolutely impartial," etc., is entitled to apply such a standard to the critics: would this consideration prevent Mr Klaw from judging them and carrying out his sentences? It is to be feared that he would do Jedburgh justice on some of us, and the out-of-work critics would join the crowd at Poverty Corner.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYS OF PARTICULAR TYPES

The Pseudo-Historical

A play running at the Savoy in March 1905, concerning Madame du Barri, called forth the usual complaints about inaccuracy in detail and undesirability of subject. The latter point is not our theme, and may be dismissed with the remark that there was nothing in the life of the creature as presented upon the stage to serve as an excuse for requiring us to spend an evening with such a worthless baggage.

At an early stage of his career the critic welcomes this class of pseudo-historical drama—but his welcome takes an unamiable form. He likes to have it produced on a Saturday evening, so that he may pass a happy Sunday. The inaccuracies fascinate him. They offer such a splendid chance of showing the knowledge possessed by him—and his library. When very young he deals with the matter in a straightforward fashion, and trounces the author for every unwitting solecism and willing falsification that is discovered.

He writes a learned little disquisition headed by a remark, in the Macaulay vein, as to matters of common knowledge, and shows from direct authority that the dramatist is quite wrong in mixing up the Du Barri who married the heroine with the Du Barri who took her away from the milliner's shop, and gives a facetious touch of lightness to his remarks by pointing out that neither of the scoundrels was connected with a certain much-advertised proprietary food.

The more obscure the blunder the greater the writer's joy in it, for he will be able to introduce observations beginning "That little known but elegant author," etc., and if the subject is earlier than the Du Barri period he will present some quotations in the uneconomically spelt old French.

A little later in his career his method changes: he relies upon his *batterie de cuisine* as much as ever, but uses some art to conceal the employment of his apparatus. There will be mere hints about the errors; an adjective between two commas will sometimes represent a severe correction. The books are not referred to, the corrections are made in a fashion which suggests that no greater authority is needed than that of the critic.

A time arrives when he comes to the conclusion that it is no part of his duties to deal with the historical aspect of the matter; but, of course, the habit is upon him, and he excuses himself by saying, after he has pointed out all the errors which he has noticed, that they would not matter in the least if the play were meritorious in other respects.

It is difficult to defend his attitude, which, however, is due to his appreciation of the fact that nowadays a little knowledge is a well-paid thing. Moreover, he does not wish it to be thought that his knowledge of

history—and books—is less than that of his rivals. Of course the inaccuracies do not matter very much unless they are so gross as to shock the great half-literate.

There is, however, a more valid objection to the historical play than that it is certain to be inaccurate; the historical drama is rarely a good drama.

The author is compelled by his matter to present it in a conventional fashion, for to give a Du Barri or a Napoleon, a Nelson or a Wellington, not in accordance with the popular concept of such personages would be to seek failure. Moreover, the writer is necessarily forced to belittle the subject if not bold enough to take a simple episode in the life of his hero or heroine, and even then, unless the miracle-working power of genius is employed, the great figure comes out as a small puppet.

The player may be made to look up like Napoleon, may follow traditions as to his gestures and mode of speech, but in none of the vast number of plays concerning the wonderful monster has he ever appeared to be a person of genius: whether handled facetiously, as in Mr Shaw's ingenious play *The Man of Destiny*, or *Madame Sans-Genie*, pathetically as in the play presented by Mr Martin Harvey, or formidably as in most works, he never seems at all different from any commonplace man put into the like circumstances. Exactly that in which he differed from all others is exactly what cannot be put upon the stage. We have had Nelson, and of course it was quite impassible to get any suggestion of the qualities that made him Nelson.

The modern tendency in the matter seems to be to choose the reprehensible—such, for instance, as Mlle. Mars, Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barri, and La Montansier, women in the career of whom no doubt there were many dramas, similar, however, to the dramas in the lives of other women of their class less famous and infamous. When, however, they are put upon the stage they cease to be remarkable, and the characters introduced to support them have the same fate; for instance, the Louis XV. at the Savoy does not give the faintest idea of the ineffably vile monarch, whilst no glimpse is shown of the quality which enabled a Du Barri to obtain her tremendous power.

It is always a case of mountain and mouse in these plays; take as an example the Sardou *Dante* play produced with prodigious drum-beating a while ago at Drury Lane. Who, if names had been altered, would have guessed that the hero of the piece was the author of the immortal poems? There has been hardly a historical play in modern times in which the identity of the famous personages could be guessed except from the names, the make-up, the costumes, and the specific facts; at the best the pieces are *tableaux vivants*.

Perhaps there is nothing illegitimate in the ambition of the player to pose as one of the mighty dead, and it is rather humility in the author which urges him to seek adventitious interest than vanity that causes him to believe himself really able to give a true idea of a Napoleon. Into such delicate questions it is needless to inquire. The point is that the lives of the great are not more dramatic than the lives of the small. Napoleon at St Helena was not more unhappy than were millions of people of his day. There is a drama as poignant in the history of César Birotteau as in that of Marie Antoinette, as big a tragedy in the career of Whitaker Wright as in that of Napoleon III.

There was a reason, which exists no longer, why the authors of the Middle Ages chose characters of great social status for their principal parts, and even this reason was not altogether well founded. It would be wrong to assert that historical plays ought not to be written, for, whilst not recommending the use of the stage instead of history classes, one can see that a historical play may illustrate ideas that could hardly be presented otherwise.

There is a noteworthy instance in the work of the much-abused Ibsen. *The Pretenders* is a historical drama amazingly rich in idea; whether the idea of kingship superbly handled in it is an anachronism it is hard to say, or to tell whether the dramatist chose his subject to illustrate his idea or the idea to embellish his subject; but in it, though obviously there is scope for magnificent mounting and interesting detail, one feels that the genius of the author has prevented him from making any sacrifice of the dramatic aspect. He has not chosen a popular historical personage and made him into the hero of the melodrama, as happens in the case of nine out of ten of the so-called historical plays, but has written a drama that demands a royal atmosphere, which he handles admirably.

What a pity that the money lavished upon the Du Barri play—and lavished very cleverly, it must be admitted, so far as the production of beautiful stage-pictures is concerned—was not spent in the mounting of a great drama like *The Pretenders*, rich in strong acting parts, magnificent in presentation of character, and really illuminated by ideas!

The Horrible in Drama

It has been alleged that *The Monkey's Paw*, a clever one-act play by Messrs Jacobs and Barker, formerly presented at the Haymarket Theatre, is too horrible for the stage. The part complained of is confined to the last scene of three.

A young man has been killed in a factory, and his body was so mangled by the fatal wheels that even his father was not allowed to see it. Late at night the father, by means of a diabolical talisman—the Monkey's Paw—succeeds in recalling his son to life, and the audience hears a knocking at the door. What is knocking? The mother is making frantic efforts to pull back the bolts. Her son is there, returned from the grave. The father, aware that the talisman, which promised the fulfilment of three wishes, is of a fiendish malignity, guesses that if the door be opened his son will stand before them alive, but fearfully mangled and mutilated, so he is groping upon the floor for the Monkey's Paw, and the audience feels that on the other side of the door is an obscene horror fresh from the grave. There was a sigh of relief in the theatre when the father found the talisman, and, using the last wish, prayed successfully that his son might be dead and at peace.

The knock, knock, was decidedly impressive, like the knocking at the door in *Macbeth*, which greatly affected Charles Lamb. Is this matter too horrible for the stage? One may compare it with another horror given not long ago, *The Soothing System*, which Mr Bouchier adapted cleverly from a story by Edgar Poe and produced at the Garrick, showing the terrible adventures of two visitors to a lunatic asylum, the inmates of which had overpowered their keepers. This was very powerful and horrible, and perhaps would have given a shiver to the hero of a famous tale in the collection of goblin stories by the Brothers Grimm.

Nevertheless it was not legitimate, partly because the circumstances are rare when it is permissible to present madness on the stage, partly because some of the mad people were repulsive to the eye, and partly because horror was the sole means and end of the piece. Many condemned *The Monkey's Paw*, yet a line can be drawn between it and *The Soothing System*—not a nice sharp line, but one of those blurred lines so faint and so uncertain, that even if their existence be admitted, there is always room for a fight on the question whether a work lies on this or that side of it.

Speaking roughly, one may say that *The Monkey's Paw* is legitimate because there is nothing in it repulsive to the eye, and for the reason that horror is not the sole means and end of it: the story, like its prototype folklore tale, "The Three Wishes," has an obvious moral. It belongs to art because the emotion caused is due to a stimulus to our imagination by the force of an idea and not of a thing exhibited. If an effort were made to show us any ghastly creature knocking, the work would be out of court.

To illustrate the line of definition already indicated, a few instances of the horrible presented on the stage in our time may be given usefully; it must be added that most appear to lie on the wrong side.

Shakespeare's adventures in the horrible are legitimate, with an exception in the case of one play of doubtful authenticity, *Titus Andronicus*. On the other hand, *Sweeney Todd; or, The Barber of Fleet Street*, would probably find no defender; whilst a historical drama I once saw in the South of France, where the hero was put upon the rack in front of the footlights and squirmed and screamed, was quite unendurable; and this is rather a pity, since there is a very powerful dramatic scene in Balzac's *Notes sur Catherine de Medicis*, which in consequence of this objection should not be used. There is a mitigated form of the torture business in *La Tosca* that caused great discussion. Perhaps those who deem it illegitimate are somewhat supersensitive; it would be more polite, and perhaps accurate, to call them hyper-modern.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde presented a very difficult case. I can remember nothing so "creepy" and "shuddery" as the first appearance of Mr Mansfield at the Lyceum in the character of the evil doctor; the house gasped at the half-seen image of a sort of obscene beast at the conservatory window, and there was the silence of breathless horror when it bounded into the room and seized its victim. Until the impression wore off the Mansfield Hyde was almost as horrible as the fantastic things born of the cruel imagination and brilliant pencil of Mr S.H. Sime, whose work is sometimes so richly embellished by imagination as well as by superb technique that one cannot deny its claim to be regarded as art.

Something of the distinction here discussed can be seen by comparing Mr Sime's drawings with the pictures of the mad painter Wirtz, whose abominable gallery at Brussels is a chamber of unimaginative horrors. It may be remembered that Mr Mansfield had a competitor in Mr Bandman Palmer, who, however, missed horror by the simple vulgarity of his horrors, and, though he may have impressed the simple-minded, was ludicrous to the thoughtful.

Returning for a moment to the clearly unpermissible, one might take a book like "Frankenstein." Certainly any presentation on the stage of the man-monster as described by the talented authoress would fall under the censure of being disgusting. This term may be used concerning several needless exhibitions of blood on the stage, and of such a matter as *Nana*, once presented in Paris. When the hapless heroine appeared in the last act with wax spots to indicate the pustules of smallpox, she very nearly "took a lot out of us," if one may borrow a phrase from "Mr Hopkinson." Obviously anything that reminds one of the ghastly horrors at the Royal College of Surgeons or the Polyclinic Institute is quite unforgivable.

This brings us not unnaturally to a matter in which there has been some change of taste. A fearful exhibition of a man in a fit, given with horrible power by that admirable actor Mr Pateman in a melodrama called *Master and Man*, would perhaps not be condemned in our days, but probably we would not endure, and certainly there would be little praise for, some of the death scenes once famous in drama. The critics nowadays would apply to the actress the phrase of the auctioneer to his wife, and implore her to "get on with her dying."

There was the famous Mlle. Croizette in *Le Sphinx*, by that detestable dramatist Octave Feuillet; she squirmed horribly after taking poison from a ring; and it was alleged that she had studied the death of patients in hospitals—a brutal, horrible thing to do. There is a good deal too much dying in *Frou-Frou*, *La Dame aux Camellias* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. Without going back to the traditions of the Greek theatre, one may say confidently that, if death on the stage is permissible, dying is almost illegitimate, and trick falls, exhibitions of agony, and the like are mere pandering to a very vulgar taste. Occasionally the dying is so handled that, though somewhat prolonged, such a vigorous phrase ought not to be applied to it. For instance, one may refer to *In the Hospital*, once presented at the Court, where Mr Beveridge, in an admirable performance, gave a very tactful, restrained exhibition of approaching death and actual decease. Another objection exists to any exhibition upon the stage of dying as compared with death. The symptoms often call up terrible memories to some members of the audience which are not evoked by the simple fact of death itself. It cannot be pretended that these references to instances of the horrible and the trifling comments upon them establish the existence of the distinction indicated, but they may be of some assistance to those who endeavour to explore the matter. It is at least pleasant to note that there is a modern tendency to obtain effects of the horrible by appeals to the imagination rather than to the senses.

It should be added that Mr F.R. Benson presented a Frankenstein play written by Mr Stephen Phillips, but

the question of the horrible appearance was discreetly avoided.

The Immorality Play

The summer visit to London of foreign players generally gives birth to discussions upon several topics. Of course the question as to the relative merits of French and English acting is raised. Upon this, one may give a warning to the thoughtless not to accept as universal the vague proposition that the French are a nation of born actors. Of course everybody each year points out that it is absurd there should be several foreign companies at a time in London cutting the throats of one another, as to which one may say that the matter is far more complicated than most people suppose.

The point worth nothing is the choice of plays by our visitors. Some of them no doubt are wise; Bernhardt, for instance, recognizes the fact that a showy piece with a big part for her is exactly the right thing provided that it is easily understood by the Berlitzians and Ollendorffians. There are others, however, such as Madame Réjane, more ambitious, who in their selection of plays do some disservice to their country.

The humour of Mr Gilbert's line "The not too French French bean" appeals irresistibly to the English.

There has long been a vague idea in British bosoms that our neighbours in sexual matters are far more immoral than ourselves. This is not the occasion upon which to examine the causes and origin of such a decidedly erroneous view. One may, however, single out one of them. It is largely the fault of writers of fiction that we remain in ignorance, or rather—and this is worse—in error concerning the character of our amiable neighbours.

In former days, putting aside the naughty farces not supposed to present a picture of actual life, most French dramas were quite sound in conventional morality. Augier presented some wicked people, such as Olympe, concerning whom he invented the phrase *la nostalgie de la boue*; but he was unequivocally moral in his aims, and preached the sanctity of marriage and maternity. Dumas *fils*, putting aside one indiscretion, was equally vigorous in his desire to support accepted views of morality. His illustrious father, it may be admitted, occasionally propounded startling propositions, but without prejudice, I fancy, to a sound belief in the idea that exceptional cases must be regarded as exceptions.

None, however, of these writers, however artificial their views of life, ever offered pictures of society based upon the proposition that the chastity of woman is of no importance.

Many of the present school of French dramatists write plays—unfortunately chosen for presentation in England—which assume the existence in society of a large class of people, otherwise amiable, who act upon the proposition that in Paris as in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Unmarried men and women live together, the males paying for the board and lodging, etc., of the females without there being any pretence that the intimacy of their relations is radically immoral under normal circumstances. They do not even indulge in fireworks in such plays. You do not have parodies of the famous phrase "Property is theft"; for the heroines fail to justify themselves by remarking that marriage is immorality. There is simply a business of union and disunion, *collage* and *décollage*, coupled with what one may call cross-unions, all of them apparently free from the embarrassment of children and none of them involving any of the more dignified of the human emotions. One of the worst of the number was *L'Age d'Aimer*, by M. Pierre Wolff, a piece so cynically immoral, and written with such an air of truth, that it might well cause some of us to shrink in horror from the idea of an *entente cordiale* with a people which, if truly represented by its fashionable dramatists, has no concept of cleanliness of life. Without posing as a champion of orthodox morality and certainly without taking objection to the study of sex questions on the stage, one may protest against works in which it is assumed there is no sex question, because every form of union, on any basis, except perhaps that of marriage, is permissible.

By-the-by, why was the press that was so indignant about the so-called problem play almost silent concerning these French dramas? Where were the phrases, such as miasmatic putrescence or putrescent miasma—I forget which it was—that used to greet the dramas of Ibsen? Where are the splendid Puritans who howled about *A Wife without a Smile*? Could it be—the thought is painful—that they did not quite understand *L'Age d'Aimer* and imagined that all the people were married? This idea is simply humiliating to one of the craft. "Ne rien comprendre, c'est tout pardonner" is a very novel view of a famous phrase.

Madame Réjane, it was stated in the papers, has expressed herself shocked by *A Wife without a Smile*, and alleged that she would never act in such a piece; but it may well be that her horror lay in the fact that the parties concerned in the farce had been through a ceremony of marriage, and that she would have accepted it as permissible if it were correctly entitled *A Cocotte without a Leer*. The point is, not that those who understand these plays or those who do not are affected in their moral ideas by them, but that they give a deplorable picture of French life and in such a guise as to suggest that it is a picture of normal French life; unfortunately *L'Age d'Aimer* is only one of many.

It is a great pity to use such a powerful vehicle as the stage for slandering a nation. That there is a certain amount of truth in works of the *Zaza*, *Sapho*, *Les Demi-Vierges* and *L'Age d'Aimer* type is incontestable; yet so far as they are true to general life one can find their parallel in this holy island. Unfortunately, whilst the fast society of Paris is no bigger than that of London, and whilst Paris is infinitely less in relation to France than London in relation to England, the great French nation is generally judged over here by flashy pictures of the fast section of Paris society, drawn, very often, if not always, from the outside, by clever people too indolent to know that the psychology of decent people is quite as interesting and dramatic as that of the gutter-creatures of mere passion who dignify their cynical desires with noble names, and, so far as the latest school is concerned, fail even to reach the humblest concept of free love.

Scripture Plays

There have been some complaints about the attitude of several of the dramatic critics concerning Mr Jerome's drama *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. It has been suggested that they have not welcomed with sufficient warmth a sincere attempt "to broaden the basis," a phrase apparently borrowed from the Tariff Reformers, to enlarge the boundaries of the British drama, but have treated the production of the piece as an everyday affair, confining their remarks to criticism concerning the workmanship.

In *The Third Floor Back* a character is introduced who is called "The Stranger," but known by everybody in the theatre to represent Jesus Christ; and "The Stranger" visits a somewhat remarkable boarding-house in which all the boarders and the landlady are vile, and after his visit all of them are fit for immediate translation to heaven.

Certainly, many of us are anxious to broaden the basis of our drama. A little while ago an important foreign paper contained an article saying that the object of the London stage is "to introduce living pictures to say pretty things for young girls," and that "of the social, religious, economic or intellectual struggles which agitate our time no trace is observable in the English stage literature of the day," and that English stage literature "has become nothing more than an insipid and dying study of the doings of the aristocratic and the rich." How sickening to know that in the main the charges are true, and that our drama, with, fortunately some exceptions, is merely a kind of Pap and Puppet affair.

On the other hand, the broadening effect of a play such as Mr Jerome's is not obvious. The Censor has been dodged, just as he was dodged many years ago, when Verdi's opera *Nebuchadonozor* was called *Ninus* or when *Ben Hur* was presented or *The Daughters of Babylon*. That official has already permitted the performance of *Everyman* and *Hannele*. Consequently, it is not easy to see that the suggested broadening of the basis has taken place.

Moreover, there are many who doubt whether broadening, so as to admit a free trade in what could be called religious or Scripture drama, is desirable. We do not pretend that the office of Censor ought to be maintained merely to keep back a flood of plays introducing Scriptural characters. The office, no doubt, does good as well as harm, but the harm far outweighs the good. Would it be beneficial if this particular restriction—this working rule that characters bearing the names of personages of the Old and New Testament are not to be presented on the stage—were relaxed. There are enthusiastic persons who desire a closer union between Church and the Stage, and wish to have the theatre employed as a kind of pulpit, who believe that Scripture plays would be beneficial. It is conceivable that under certain circumstances the attitude of these persons would be sound, but not under the present circumstances.

Most of our theatres are run as a mere commercial speculation by people who care little enough about art, and probably nothing about religion. We have had one instance of the sort of thing that might be expected, *The Sign of the Cross*, in which a commonplace melodrama was mixed up with hymns and pseudo-religious talk and miracles, and a ballet as immodest, as pulse-disturbing, as any given in the theatres or the halls. Many visited the play who had never been to a theatre before, since they believed that it was really a religious drama outside their ban. Some were horrified, and from being potential playgoers became rapidly adverse to the stage and all its works; others were shocked and disturbed and delighted by the exhibition of female flesh in the ballet, with a result which can easily be guessed. No doubt a number of persons believed that the piece did good to them and other folk—some people will believe anything.

The people of taste and sensibility, who, whatever their state of religious belief, would regard with abhorrence the exhibition on the ordinary commercial stage of the Christ whom they were brought up to regard as Divine, have a title to consideration. The traffic in blasphemy that would immediately follow the suggested enlargement of the boundary of the theatre is horrible to contemplate. Such abominations as a combination of Christ and semi-naked women doing more or less mitigated *danses du ventre*, would be justified as giving an Oriental colour.

There is another side. It may be taken that our laws against blasphemy have moved a good deal since Lord Coleridge's famous summing-up concerning the essential mutability of the Common Law about blasphemy which he gave in *Regina v. Ramsey and Foote*; if the restriction were removed what power would prevent the atheists from producing distinctly anti-Christian plays which might very well cause riots, which certainly would prove a serious counterblast, if discreetly handled, to the efforts of the Church and Stage enthusiasts. One can conceive every kind of crank with money producing a play to advocate his particular brand of religion.

We could not expect all the actors chosen to represent Christ to be gentlemen of fine sensibility, high character, and sincere feeling for art, like Mr Forbes Robertson; it is hardly pleasant to think of the character in the hands of some members of the profession. One can imagine a feeling of revulsion if any of the actresses who have made history—in the Divorce Court—were chosen for the part of the Virgin Mary.

This is said without for one moment suggesting that the players are one whit the worse in their way of living than the rest of us, or that managers of theatres are wickeder or more unscrupulously commercial than anyone else. Yet, speaking of the managers, one is forced to admit that the majority consult the taste of the majority, that many are willing enough to pander to vulgar cravings, and it is not imaginable that, unless our stage can be put upon a new basis, a freedom to produce religious or Scriptural drama would fail to cause great scandals.

As the matter stands, the attitude of the Censor, though not logical, is not wholly unsatisfactory; it is ludicrous enough that he should have adopted an ostrich policy towards Mr Jerome's piece, yet no harm has been done by the production of this sincere and respectful drama. Indeed, some good may have come from it. In an ideal world, no doubt, we should all be severely logical; in England we are radically illogical, and we

carry out most of our affairs on a basis of compromises.

If you do not call your leading character Christ in the theatre you may call him Christ outside, seems the proposition implied in the licence for *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, but the very basis of the authority of the Lord Chamberlain is such that one cannot apply logic to his decrees and say that because he has permitted this he must sanction that. Some of these remarks may seem to suggest that it is advisable the office should be retained, which is not the case. We pay too high a price for it since it tends to paralyse the drama; on the other hand it is to be hoped that so long as the office exists the holders of it will be very careful concerning any efforts to exploit the Scriptures for the profit of the theatres.

The success of the St James's play will cause a rush of people, anxious to go "one better"—or worse—than Mr Jerome. No harm—possibly some good—may come from the present piece, but the circumstances should be regarded as exceptional. We have few playwrights so earnest as Mr Jerome, few actors or managers with such high ideals as those of Mr Forbes Robertson. It seems permissible and advisable to add that this article is not written from the point of view of one who professes to be "on the side of the angels," but merely as a protest against what in the long run would be one more blow to our staggering stage.

Anecdotal Plays

It appears that "Percival" of *The Referee* has made a great discovery. He has found out the reason why French plays are better than English, is able to put his "finger on the real difference which exists between French plays and English," he now knows why "many more plays are successfully adapted from French into English than *vice versa*." This sounded thrilling, but after finishing his article the reader was about in the humour of a person who has been promised "an awfully rippin' new story" and receives a feeble "chestnut."

Mr "Percival" is really like the American who discovered on going home very late at night the fact that the sun rises in the east, and cackled as much about his discovery as a hen over her first egg. His explanation is that, "with one exception—Pinero—the English playwright invents a plot and then writes in characters to carry that plot out. Your French playwright does not do this.... He takes an idea and works it out with dramatic action instead of taking a dramatic action and working it out with such incident ideas as may happen along. And sometimes your French dramatist just takes people with characteristics and lets them work their own play out for him."

There is no need to seek deeply to find out why "many more plays are successfully adopted from French into English than *vice versa*." The explanation is that owing to Parisian prejudice hardly any English plays of any merit, Shakespeare's excepted, have been adapted, and there is a ferocious hostility in France to foreign drama.

The modern French drama may be better than the English; perhaps "Percival" hardly asserts that it is, unless in the passage already quoted and in this phrase: "There is something about three plays in four in France which is lacking at home, and that something is something good." No doubt, if we take the past fifty years as a basis for comparison of the two dramas, the French is the better; but during the last fifteen there has been a change, and one could not make any sweeping assertion upon the subject as regards the plays of this period, unless it be limited to the plays produced in the ordinary way of theatrical commerce.

If the alleged superiority exists, one can offer two reasons for it without relying upon the brilliant discovery of "Percival." The first is the greater freedom of the French dramatist in choice of subject, and also in treatment; this gives him an enormous advantage.

The second is that, whilst there are almost as many people in Paris who will welcome rubbish as there are in London, there can also be found a large number of playgoers with a good deal of intellectual curiosity, whilst the intelligent amateur—using the phrase in its French sense—is comparatively rare in London. Consequently, the French dramatist has not only more freedom in subject and treatment than the English, but in addition a greater public of playgoers who bring their intellect into the auditorium. Probably "Percival" will claim that this second ground of explanation enters into his, and there is some truth in this.

On the other hand, his statement of fact that our dramatists, with the exception of Pinero, are mere story-tellers, and that the French authors write plays based upon ideas, is quite inaccurate.

Roughly, one may put dramas into three categories—the play of anecdote, the play of idea, and the play of character. "Percival" recognises the third category by his remark that "sometimes your French dramatist just takes people with characteristics and lets them work out their own play for him." As a matter of fact, few plays belong exclusively to any one of these categories. In which would "Percival" place Shakespeare's? He began to write a play by borrowing the plot from somebody, and primarily all his pieces may be regarded as anecdotal, but, in the passage of the story through his mind to the pen, in some cases it became the vehicle for an idea, and, in all, the story grew to be of infinitely less importance than the characters.

Take *Othello*. You may give an account of it as a story in which it is merely an adaptation of another man's work. You may treat it as a study of the idea of jealousy, and be uncertain whether suspicion is not more correct as a definition than jealousy, or you may consider it as an amazing gallery of pictures of character. It may be put into each category, and belongs to all.

Probably the question whether a drama belongs primarily to this, that, or the other of the categories is as otiose as the discussion whether the hen or the egg came first. No play lives that does not belong to the second and third category, and it cannot be put upon the boards without some reliance upon the first. On the other hand, whatever may be the belief of individual dramatists, it is doubtful whether any dramas are produced primarily based upon "taking people with characteristics and letting them work out their own play." It is obvious that people, even people with strongly marked characteristics, can live for years in juxtaposition

without their relation to one another resulting in anything dramatic, or even theatrical. Paula Tanqueray and her husband might have lived and died unhappily together without offering any materials to the playwright, and so indeed might any of the characters in any of the plays by the brilliant author. Only when facts exterior to them begin to play upon the characters dramatically is there room for drama. There is an enormous amount of plot, psychological or physical, in every play.

Next to the first, the second category produces the plays most clearly defined. One might take the plays of Brieux, and some of the dead-and-gone dramas of Charles Reade. Here we have dramas of idea, more accurately of subject, still more accurately of problem. They are works in which the dramatist tries to prove something, or, at least, present some problem of social life, leaving to the audience the task of coming to a conclusion.

However, even M. Brieux cannot get on without category number one, whilst he puts as much of category number three in his work as he can. He invents a story, and he chooses and endeavours to display characters as a vehicle for exhibiting his subject. Sometimes, to be just, he gets along—in a fashion—with a surprisingly small amount of plot, as in *Les Bienfaiteurs*. Even then the necessity of having some sort of form makes a good deal of story necessary. Jean Jullien, the inventor of the phrase "Une tranche de la vie," endeavoured to give plays without formal beginning or end, unconsciously, perhaps, tried to carry out a desire of Merimée's to write a play in respect of which the audience needs no knowledge of antecedent facts; but his success—in more senses than one—was only partial.

The English dramatists of what one might call the Independent Theatre, Stage Society, and Court Theatre management have struggled to avoid the anecdotal play, sometimes with a brilliant result, as in *The Voysey Inheritance*, *John Bull's Other Island*, or *Strife*; Mr J.M. Barrie in several successful works has minimised the story as much as possible.

Why does "Percival" ignore them? Has he overlooked the fact that most of the French dramas successfully adapted belong primarily to the category he condemns, and nearly all the rest to a subdivision of number three, ignored by him. This subdivision consists of star plays—that is, of dramas of theatrical character—in the manufacture of which the French dramatists excel. Many of the dramas by Dumas *filis* show an ingenious combination of this subdivision with the anecdotal play. And Pinero—our exception—how would "Percival" classify *His House in Order*, which has a strong story? In reality it is a very adroit mixture of story, idea, and comedy of character, this is the case with the other works of our leading dramatist.

The fact is that "Percival" has mistaken treatment for conception. All dramatists try to combine the three categories, but the worst class attaches too much importance to the mere story; unfortunately our audiences are like the bad dramatist in this respect: hence the almost purely anecdotal play, like the anecdotal picture, is the most popular.

The Supernatural

That the forbidden is attractive is a commonplace and true. The third party in the divorce case is often less beautiful than the petitioner, the length of water beyond our own always promises better sport, the mushrooms seem to grow more thickly in the fields of others. In drama we see the same law in operation. No canon of art makes the "supernatural" unlawful to the dramatist, but it is generally looked upon as illegitimate in serious drama. The word "supernatural" is used in its popular sense, which is well enough understood, but indefinable. Naturally the dramatist is tempted the more when he sees the novelist using the supernatural effectively.

No wonder the playwright has tried to adapt *Frankenstein*; he has merely succeeded in presenting a grotesque unterrific figure where Mrs Shelley gave a thrill of horror. We have had several plays on the boards which overstep bounds. One can read Mr Jerome's tale "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" without being oppressed by a sense of the inadequacy of his machinery, but when Mr Forbes Robertson is supposed on the stage to "blarney" eight or nine people who have ugly souls into righteousness we are not only unconvinced but actively incredulous. Possibly to simple minds the affair would be more impressive if the lodger wore a halo supposed to be invisible to the people on the stage, or produced an occasional flash of lightning or growl of thunder.

Take that dear old crusted melodrama *The Corsican Brothers*. The story was thrilling enough when merely read; it was easy to believe that the Dei Franchi had a special brand of constitution which enabled them to see the family ghost whilst the more sceptical could talk of brain waves and suggestions and of subjective phenomena. That is where the modern novelist gets out of all hobbles; if you will not accept his spook as a genuine, old-fashioned spook, you can hardly refuse to swallow it as a subjective phenomenon. The blessed word "subjective" extricates him from all troubles.

The poor dramatist has no such refuge. Occasionally he can work his plot by means of a vision; and the hypnotic trance has served, as in the case of *The Polish Jew*; but his ghosts have to be strictly objective. In fact, using a technical term frivolously, his ghosts expect the ghost to walk regularly on Fridays. There is no humbug about them; no "Pepper"—but they have to be taken with a ton of salt!

This difficulty was, perhaps, of no great importance at a time when most people had faith in ghosts; when the most sceptical did not go further than Madame de Staël, who alleged that she did not believe in them but was afraid of them. It is not recorded what Benjamin Constant, her unhappy lover, thought about them. Nowadays things have changed and ghosts and the personal devil have joined the ranks of the unemployed, or only obtain employment with Mr Stead and his Julia.

There is, of course, the spook of the spiritualist, who demands serious consideration; but plays dealing with spiritualism are not common. Perhaps because such playgoers as will accept the more or less material ghost

are even more sceptical than the scientific as to the objective phenomena of the spiritualist. No doubt managers try to rise to the occasion and to make a steady advance in ghosts, devils and angels, but the mechanical improvements seem small. Indeed, in a sense there has been no advance since the days when Pepper's ghost terrified us at the poor old Polytechnic, and unfortunately the system of Pepper can only be used to a limited extent. There were moments of thrill in *Ulysses* at His Majesty's.

The stage angels are the worst of the supernaturals. Because angels are supposed to dwell off the earth it is assumed that they must fly. Furthermore, it is imagined that as fliers they belong to the heavier-than-air order, the monoplane variety, and so must have gigantic wings; no one makes provision for the working of the wings, which would involve tremendous muscular energy. You may answer that they have miraculous energy wherewith to flap them. If, however, the miraculous enters into the matter, why not imagine a miraculous method of flying which does not demand wings—by so doing you would avoid the necessity of making the angels look like ill-constructed birds. Something "smart" might be done in the way of a "dirigible balloon" species of angel! Fiends are modelled as flying-machines on the lines of the bat—this may be taken from the latest Mephisto. The contrivers of stage effects are not to be blamed because they cannot overcome the difficulties offered by the playwrights. Yet they have not exhausted their means. They seem to be working on wrong lines, and so, too, are our scene-painters generally; but that is raising a very large question demanding separate treatment.

Certainly some years ago Mr Gordon Craig experimentally, in a curious piece called *Sword or Song*, presented at the Shaftesbury, gave suggestions in the supernatural that deserved attention, and in a broad way showed the possibility of arriving at striking stage effects by suggestion rather than actual depiction. It is, indeed, the fault of our play-mounters that they are too precise about dotting "i's" and crossing "t's," and like the pet photographers of amateurs they show too much detail.

Years ago, on the first night of *Hansel und Gretel* at Daly's—what a delightful first night!—for a while the effect of the troops of angels on the stairs was quite charming—for a while—but, alas! the stage grew lighter, gauzes were raised, and then we saw plainly the young women of the chorus, with big wings, and could identify face after face, recollecting this young lady as formerly a peasant boy in one comic opera, and that as a village maiden in another, and so on. What a "give away," to use a common effective phrase!

The last prodigious production of *Faust*? Well, what thinking person can swallow the devil and the electric sparks from the sword, the wine drawn from the table, the comicalities of the witches' kitchen, or be moved by the Brocken scenes? It is very well to say that Goethe intended and expected his drama to be put on the stage, though this can hardly apply to the second part. Even if he did he cannot have expected such material matters to be treated as of serious importance—of such importance that, as represented, his great drama seems chiefly contrived to lead up to spectacular effects, plus a seduction story occasionally hurt by needlessly plain phrases.

It may be said that this is the jam used to induce us to swallow the powder; but really there is so much jam and so little powder that the benefit of the dose is doubtful. To be just to Sir Herbert Tree—his *Faust* sinned no more in the matter than did the Lyceum setting; perhaps even a little less. Certainly there is rather more Goethe in the matter than Wills introduced.

It may be said that Shakespeare's plays were intended for the stage, and that he introduced "ghosts," as in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III.*; possibly he believed in them. Yet, so far as one can judge from such knowledge as we have of the stage as he knew it and its resources, the treatment of his ghosts must have been really quite conventional and scenically unimpressive. There was some gain in this, for the more directly the ghost business is effective the more the attention of the audience is drawn to it; though the interest of the scene is not in the ghost but the effect it produces on the other characters; the case is one that may be summed up in the phrase quoted for us by Bacon—the better the worse.

CHAPTER V

PLAYS OF PARTICULAR TYPES

Unsentimental Drama

It was suggested long ago that all the conceivable tunes would soon have been written, and possibly, if for "conceivable" one substitutes the word "obvious," there was truth in the suggestion. On the other hand experience breeds in us the belief that composers of genius could go on inventing novel melodies for centuries to come. Things have been happening lately, and threaten soon to occur again, which appear to show that our popular dramatists imagine that there are no new plots or subjects open to them. It is said that one playwright is busily engaged upon a novel version of *La Dame aux Camellias* which is to be distinguished from Dumas' novel and drama by the fact that the heroine is chaste and does nothing worse than "a bit of flirting." It is to be hoped that Dumas will never hear of this astounding impudent perversion of his play. Perhaps ere now he has become hardened by the fact that the Duse has represented Marguerite as a creature of exquisite purity.

Moreover, it is alleged that somebody is going to write another version of *Faust*—presumably the

pantomime edition by Wills is copyright. In addition, it appears that Mr Stephen Phillips has concocted an adaptation of *The Bride of Lammermoor* in which the story and characters are vastly improved. Alas, poor Scott! On top of all this we hear of countless adaptations on the market, so that the ignorant wonder whether our dramatists are played out.

Perhaps the secret is to be discovered in some passages that occurred during the trial of an action a little while ago, between two publishers, in which there was evidence to the effect that a book could not be a novel unless it had a love-story.

Of course, if upon our playwrights is imposed the limitation that all their plays must contain a love-story, the difficulty of the position is very great, and the greater still because they are not allowed to tell naughty love-stories unless they force upon them a moral ending, and they are very rarely permitted to indulge in a love-story which does not end in a wedding or the reconciliation of respectably wedded citizens. No wonder that as a body they seem to be getting bankrupt in imagination; they appear to be in the position of a cook who is never allowed to handle anything but sweets.

The state of things is rather curious. It may be often asserted truthfully of the West End theatres that there are as many love-stories as playhouses. Of late years, notwithstanding the evidence referred to, some of our novelists have shown a tendency to break away from the tradition; also some of the unfashionable playwrights exhibit signs of revolt; but the managers are timid, very timid, in the matter, and this is curious, because one has only to turn to Shakespeare to see that we have had modern successes with plays in which the love-story is trifling when it exists at all—*Hamlet*, for instance, and *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Henry VIII.*, and other historical pieces. Indeed, as soon as one begins to enumerate it appears that in most of the Shakespearean plays presented of late years the love interest, if any, has been a minor matter. Our managers might learn something from this.

There is mighty little sentimental love in the plays of "G.B.S." that have, or have had, a perilously disturbing vogue. And, indeed, when that ferocious dramatist does handle love it is in an intensely unsentimental fashion.

Moreover, love in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas is treated with cruel levity. Turn, by the way, to another great social satirist, Molière; one finds again that love sometimes is ignored, and when handled at all often treated dryly, or as a matter of little moment. Our most popular comedy, *The School for Scandal*, though it has a reconciliation business, is quite independent of any sentimental matter of importance. In several of the works of Mr Barrie, our most original popular dramatist, the sentimental interest is slight where it exists at all.

It seems needless to multiply instances; enough has been said to show that it is quite possible to make money with plays that are not at all sentimental. What a pity, then, that the dramatists who aim at general popularity should feel themselves constrained to be more or less sentimental, and also that managers should fight shy of the works of those dramatists, other than Mr Barrie, who have the courage to write unsentimental plays! For it is to be noticed that in the last ten years a great many unsentimental English plays have been written and produced by non-commercial managements. It does not from this follow that all of them ignore love and the relation of the sexes, or even avoid actual love-stories; but as a class they eschew the sentimental treatment which is and for a long time has been the distinguishing feature of British Drama.

A particular instance of the effect of the modern tradition may be mentioned. *The Beloved Vagabond* had a great success as a novel; it enjoyed a London run as a play of about two months only. In the book the love-story is a minor matter, treated mainly with a sub-acid humour, and the author wisely avoids an absurd happy-ever-after conclusion. The play was supersaturated with sentiment, with a sentiment which drove out nearly all the humour and, roughly speaking, all the plausibility. Is it easy to doubt that it is the sentimental treatment which has caused the history of the play to be so different from that of the novel?

There are signs that the public is growing rather tired of molasses, which in fact is ceasing to be "golden" syrup. The main effect, apart from purely technical matters, of the new drama, that practically speaking began with the production of *The Doll's House* at the Great Queen Street Theatre, has been destructive; the outcome has included some brilliant plays, the drawing power of which has never been fairly and fully tested; but the most important result has been the discontentment of the ordinary playgoer with the fare which once would have delighted him. Many bubbles have been pricked; many conventions killed; many plays ridiculed by houses that once would have accepted them eagerly.

Numerous causes have contributed to the fact that during the last few years the total sum lost in the London playhouses has been enormous, despite some big successes, several of which have been of unsentimental plays—such as *Little Mary*—and it seems to be time for the managers and playwrights to begin to consider the question whether they cannot go farther afield and handle themes from which they have held aloof hitherto. Gorgeousness of mounting has ceased to help managers; even the maidens in their teens have grown sophisticated, and jeer at the bread-and-butter love-stories; and successful modern French drama offers a much smaller proportion of adaptable plays than used to be the case. There must be a bottom to the deepest purse, and things can hardly go on in the legitimate playhouses as they have during the last few years; so it seems to be almost time for the managers to try to get out of a groove and look about for the unsentimental drama.

Since this was written the Phillips-Comyns Carr version of *Faust* was produced and not accepted by the critical, whilst the Phillips version of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, called *The Lost Heir*, was a failure and deserved its fate. Also it may be added Mr Frohman has produced *Strife*, *Justice*, *Misalliance* and *The Madras House*.

For some time past people have been seeking an explanation of the weakness of our modern drama, of the fact that except in the byways of the theatre, and with rare instances on the highways, it is sadly unoriginal. Numerous causes have been suggested, and probably many have played their part. There is one element in the matter the importance of which has been overlooked—it is the mania for making adaptations. No one will deny that most of the adaptations make bad plays, and that a large proportion prove unsuccessful; and the making of them has an evil effect upon the makers. The matter under discussion is not adaptations for the English stage of foreign plays—a topic of great importance, for the lack of protection to the foreign dramatists during a long period was a great cause of the sterility of British drama; and the habit of importing has not ceased merely because the foreigner acquired the right to payment. Many a playwright who might have become an original dramatist had all his power of imagination and invention atrophied through disuse.

Nowadays we import less than formerly, but our playwrights still produce the second-hand drama, getting their material ready-made from novels, and they suffer in the same way as their predecessors, and injure their natural gifts. This is not an entirely new thing. It may be suggested that Shakespeare was one of the most persistent of adapters. He may very well be left out of the question. Such genius as his has its own laws and privileges, and cannot very well be brought in as an element when discussing the procedure of much lesser men, and yet few critics will deny that in some instances his plays were injured by his following too closely the course of his original. Perhaps in his case the gifts of imagination and invention were sometimes dulled because he was to such a great extent an adapter.

The idea of the novelist may inspire a dramatist with an idea for a play, but the novelist's treatment of his idea hardly ever supplies the dramatist with useful materials. We have had scores of radically bad plays adapted by clever men from good novels. At first sight it looks as if the playwright would gain an advantage from using ready-made materials, but careful consideration and experience show that this is not the case; he is overwhelmed by excess of material, and his task of selection is appallingly difficult.

Moreover, his material is all in the wrong form, and has to be transformed—and the process of transformation requires great skill.

For it must be remembered that the methods of the dramatist and the novelist as a broad proposition are entirely different; and when the playwright is dealing with a long, finely-written, complex novel he can hardly expect his adaptation to bear a greater resemblance to the original than that of an easy pianoforte transcription to one of the later operas of Wagner.

One need only consider any of the novels of Dickens and the stage version that impudently bears its name to see how entirely crushed the dramatist has been by excess of material—like a Tarpeia by the gifts of the enemy—by difficulty in selection, and in transformation, and recollect that the product has almost always been an inconsecutive story, unintelligible to those unacquainted with the book, destitute of the peculiar atmosphere of Dickens, irritating to lovers of the novel because pet characters have been entirely suppressed or cut down nearly to nothing, and only recognisable in many cases as a version of the original on account of costumes, names, make-up, scraps of eccentric dialogue, and general trend of the mutilated story.

Now, seeing that there are upon record a vast number of adaptations that have failed, a number that bears a proportion to the successful far higher than the proportion of failures in original works, it seems worth while to consider for a little what is at the bottom of the matter, since to do so may prevent some playwrights from wasting their time and other people's money.

First, one may ask why so many dramatists indulge in the rather inglorious work of adaptation. No doubt there is one great advantage in producing an adaptation of a successful novel. A large mass of ready-made advertisement exists: of the thousands or tens or hundreds of thousands who read a popular novel, a very large proportion feel curious to see it upon the stage. Consequently the adaptation starts with the enormous aid of having been advertised very effectively on a big scale. This element alone is not sufficient to command success; for if the piece is indifferent, if the critics condemn it, if the reception is unfavourable and the unofficial opinion of playgoers is hostile, it can do little to save the work, since the readers of the book get the idea that the dramatist has made a mess of it and they keep away, and so of course does the general public.

It is, however, commonly believed that it is easier to manufacture a play from a book than to write an original drama. People imagine that the playwright, finding characters, plot and incidents ready-made in the novel, can produce the piece with less trouble and difficulty than if he has to look for them at large. This is a delusion founded upon the failure to perceive the radical difference between the technique of the novelist and the dramatist. It is true that in some cases adaptations have had enormous success: one might take two modern instances, *The Little Minister* and *Sherlock Holmes*. The latter really confirms these remarks. The general public would fancy that in the stories of "Sherlock Holmes" there are plenty of effective plots. The ingenious authors of the play were shrewd enough to perceive this was not the case; consequently they merely used certain characters from the tales and invented an entirely new story. Later on Sir Arthur did find one story suitable, and *The Speckled Band* has been successful as a lurid melodrama at the Adelphi and the Globe.

In *The Little Minister* success was achieved by entirely vulgarising a charming book, by throwing away all that distinguished it, and converting what might be called a delicately sentimental comedy into a farce. We are not, however, dealing with the question from the point of view of the novelist's credit; incidentally it must be observed that there are few modern cases on record where the play has not borne to the novel the relation of a crude black-and-white copy to a picture.

The difficulties are two: objective and subjective. The second is the subtler, therefore the more dangerous. The adapter, being well acquainted with the novel, rarely succeeds in forgetting that the general public is not, and he almost invariably assumes that the audience will supply from memory matters that he has left out. In the case of most adapted plays events that appear utterly improbable to those ignorant of the novel seem

quite likely to the people who have read it and can supply the missing facts which explain the improbable matters. To the adapter, particularly when he is also the novelist, the characters and events have a real existence, and his task, unlike that of the original playwright, does not seem to be that of bringing them into existence but merely of exhibiting them. Naturally, then, he takes comparatively little pains to prove what to him is axiomatic.

The main objective difficulty is due to the fact that a play is a very short thing—though, alas! this does not always seem to be the case—and a novel is relatively long and often has many characters. In some cases, the playwright attempts to deal with this difficulty by ignoring the existence of half the people who figure in the original. Even then, a mass of explanations has to be jettisoned. There is worse trouble than this: the characters built up in the novel by hundreds of fine touches have to be presented in the play by a few bold strokes. An extraordinary art is necessary in what is not a work of mere transcription, but almost a work of reconception.

There is the further vast difficulty that whilst in most cases the novelist's procedure is to work on a system of exciting curiosity, it is an unwritten law of drama, almost universally true, that there must be no surprises for the audience, except, it may be, in farcical plays that do not pretend to represent life truly and in matters of detail. No doubt, unconscientious readers often commit an act of treason to the author, and cheat him by beginning at the end. One may urge that no one expects a play to do full justice to the novel, and that it is permissible to leave out much. The important fact, however, is that the much necessarily left out in the case of good novels as a rule is exactly that which distinguishes them from the bad. The atmosphere vanishes; secondary characters, often the most pleasing, have to be eliminated or rendered shadowy; thrilling incidents must be cut for want of space, and the remainder is almost inevitably the bare bones of the book, which never, however, really constitute anything like a complete skeleton.

Plays with a Purpose

During one season we had a comparatively large number of plays with a purpose—for instance, *An Englishman's Home*, *The Head of the Finn*, *Strife*, and *The House of Bondage*.

For the sake of convenience let us refer to them and works of a similar character as "problem plays" although that useful term got spoilt some years ago by acquiring a secondary meaning, and became applied almost exclusively to pieces concerning fallen women.

In respect of this rather rare branch of drama there is one matter worthy of notice which has not been quite sufficiently discussed. Yet the point is one referred to several times in criticisms contained in these articles. This is the author's duty to write in such a fashion as to seem impartial. It is needless to suggest that he ought to be impartial, since no one ever takes a real interest in any debatable matter without ceasing to be impartial, and nobody will ever write a play worth seeing unless he takes a deep interest in his subject.

Now, looking at the four plays already mentioned, one may see to some extent how this impartiality operates. There is a difficulty connected with *An Englishman's Home*, for it was alleged—and also denied—that the author had no intention when writing it of dealing seriously with the question of national defence and invasion, and it must be recollected that some alterations were made without his knowledge, which included the addition of a vulgar clap-trap ending, that may do him real injustice. It has generally been regarded as a problem play, as intended to exhibit to us dramatically the fact that we live fondly in fancied security. As drama, it was seriously injured by the obvious bias, by the want of impartiality; it was taken by some to be a warning that we must not trust to the Territorials; but, although the conscriptionist party has welcomed it as establishing their view, its manifest injustice to the citizen soldier has actually caused it to be used as an argument the other way. Moreover, the feeling of insincerity caused by the bias seriously diminished its acting value in the eyes of the critical. The fact of its use as an argument by people of almost opposite views does not prove its impartiality, but rather that its injustice has bred a reaction.

The next of the four is *The House of Bondage*, which had less success than it deserved. The piece manifestly was intended to prove that a woman ought to be entitled at law to a dissolution of marriage on the single ground of her husband's infidelity; the proposition was put in the form of a claim to equality of rights in the sexes to divorce. The question has more than one side, and there is a good deal to be said against Mr Obermer's contention; unfortunately, the author did not attempt to put forward the other view, or even to suggest that there is one. The result was that only those who share the opinion of the author were in sympathy with the piece; to others it seemed manifestly unfair; in fact, the author appeared anxious to convince those who favour his own views, and not those opposed to them.

In *The Head of the Firm* and *Strife* one had quite a different state of things. The dramatist played the *advocatus diaboli* very cleverly, and the other side felt that its case had been stated fairly. The best way to convince people of anything is to present their own views to them in a fashion which they deem just, and then offer them reasons for doubting the truth of their opinions. Both works obviously are anti-capitalist in tendency, and yet, in different degrees and different ways, the capitalist view was stated so fairly, whilst the evil consequences of it were shown so vigorously, that many people who were on the side of the capitalist were forced to think, and therefore to doubt.

Mr Galsworthy bravely went so far as to hint, without stating the proposition, that what seems bad in the labour point of view is really an evil consequence of the capitalist attitude. In this respect he has followed, legitimately, the treatment of the greatest "problem play" yet written, *The Doll's House*, a work that in hundreds of thousands of households has caused something like a revolution in the relations between husband and wife. Ibsen used the appearance of impartiality so finely, stated the husband's case so fairly, that there were terrific quarrels as to what was his point of view, and the result of the quarrels and discussions was the serious consideration by people of the question dealt with in the drama. It is this

discussion that the reformer desires, being confident that the discussion of things long deemed right without discussion is the surest road to reform.

From the point of view of dramatic art this impartiality is essential, because without it the necessary impersonal element cannot be given to a play. In such a work as the prison drama *It's never too Late to Mend*, by Charles Reade, one seems to see all the time the hand of the perfervid, almost frantic, reformer, and the same remark applies to several of his novels. Of course, one does not ask the playwright to be, but only to seem, impartial. To demand real impartiality would be to ask that reality which is out of place upon the stage, the function of which is, not to present themselves, but, to borrow Hamlet's idea, reflections of them, and, it would be more accurate to say, to give ideas of them by presenting images intentionally distorted.

For that fourth wall, the existence of which Mr Jerome K. Jerome rather quaintly and childishly suggested by the fender and fireirons laid in front of the footlights in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, really operates as a distorting glass, although it is not there. This sounds a little paradoxical, yet is clear enough. Things upon the stage have not the same effect if regarded from the farther side of the footlights as when considered from the nearer. This does not apply merely to things seen, but also to things heard. In this respect there is a resemblance to the work of the impressionist painter. Speaking more closely, one may say that the scene-painter's canvas, with what, when seen at a few feet, are coarse splashes and daubs of colour, is typical of the whole theatrical production. It is imperative, then, that even the impartiality should not be real impartiality. Moreover, absolute impartiality would involve in many cases the suppression of the criticism of life which is the essence of comedy.

"Problem plays," works endeavouring truly to represent to the audience real life, and involving a criticism of life, are so rare that it is worth drawing attention to a danger to dramatists. There is no need to point it out to Mr Galsworthy, who in *The Silver Box* and in *Strife* shows that he fully appreciates the point; nor to Mr Granville Barker, who produced *Strife*, for in *Waste*, which is in most respects the greatest English drama of our times, he exhibited it with extraordinary intensity, and also in *The Voyage Inheritance*, an admirable play, which it is to be hoped we shall soon see again. It is to the beginners that one would like to insist on the proposition that you must not push your views down the throats of the audience, but leave spectators to draw their own conclusions, taking pains to see that the conclusions which they fancy are drawn voluntarily by them in reality are forced upon them. Indeed, you must imitate the skilful professor of legerdemain, and "palm" your views upon the audience as he "palms" a card upon his victim.

Drama and Social Reform

Probably at no time and in no country has there been so much fuss about the stage as nowadays in England, and the annual budget of our theatre involves millions. Moreover, people often talk about it as a great educational force, a great instrument for progress, a great vehicle for the dissemination of ideas and so on. Yet the theatre in England remains almost entirely aloof from real life. To the majority of playgoers, an immense majority, it is merely a place of entertainment, except so far as the plays of Shakespeare are concerned; they are supposed to have some educational value, of what nature goodness knows.

Perhaps this phenomenon is not surprising, if one regards the matter historically. The theatre has never forgotten that the Puritans suppressed it for a time and have always been hostile, and it identifies them with the Whig, the Liberal, the Radical, and the Socialist. It recollects that the Royalists revived it, and have always been friendly, and they are represented by the Tory, the Conservative, the Unionists and the Tariff Reformers. So the stage does not lend itself readily to ideas of reform, or sober study of life, or sober anything—indeed, it has long been a little too closely connected with *the* trade.

There must be players, managers, and some playgoers belonging to the Liberals or Radicals, but they are much in the minority: rarely, if ever, is a suggestion of Liberalism uttered in a theatre except by way of well-welcomed scorn. We are almost all pro-Bungs, House-of-Lords men, and ardent Tariff Reformers.

There is another important element in the matter—the theatre appears to be peculiarly engrossing to those connected with it. Persons entitled to speak have often said that to most of the people attached to the stage the theatre is a little world apart, in which they are content to live almost oblivious of the greater world around. It has been asserted that during the last siege of Paris, whilst some of the players went out and fought bravely, the majority were more concerned at the fate of the stage than that of the city, and an actor of some eminence once bitterly declared that the majority of his *confrères* had no interest outside the "shop" and never talked anything but "shop."

It may be that all classes of stage-folk are tarred with the same brush; that these remarks concerning the actors apply to the managers, the dramatists, and the critics. Moreover, there are certainly exceptions; indeed, it is well known that several players of distinction take an active part in civic life. At any rate, the fact remains that the stage seems to concern itself very little with the improvements of social life.

In a nebulous way the theatre plays with certain aspects of the relations between the two sexes, but without seriously considering any question of feasible reform. Upon one aspect which seemed to promise matter for powerful drama we had only one important work—I refer to the Deceased Wife's Sister question, which was handled in an able play by a Mr Gatti, and presented at the Court Theatre. Miss Olga Nethersole acted very powerfully in it. One would have thought that this and other questions of legislation would have attracted the attention of dramatists; they did at one time. The strenuous Charles Reade was prodigious in his stage attacks upon bad laws, and effective as well. At the present moment MM. Brioux and Paul Hervieux are flogging some of the laws of France, and the German stage has seen a good many pieces which before the word became demonetised one would have called Problem plays.

Looking back upon the English drama of the last twenty years one notices as a curiosity that it is the

woman rather than the man dramatist who appreciates the utility of the stage as a means for seeking reform. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the most tremendous law-changing influences ever exercised by fiction, came from the pen of a woman, though it may be that Mrs Beecher Stowe was not the author of any of the stage versions presented over here. Taking a long jump from the sixties, one finds that in modern times—indeed, within the last few years—four women dramatists have tackled political or politico-social problems. There was the Hon. Mrs Alfred Lyttleton, and her able, interesting play called *Warp and Woof*, dealing with the question of shopgirls and the Factory Act. Next in order of date came *Votes for Women*, by Miss Elizabeth Robins, a brilliant novelist and admirable actress, a little too much carried away by her subject to do more than write one big living scene in a conventional play. Mrs Alfred Mond (now Lady Alfred Mond) is the author of a short piece dealing with Tariff Reform. Not long ago we had a revival of *Diana of Dobson's*, Miss Cicely Hamilton's valuable comedy, in which the "living-in" system of shopgirls and the question of the cruel fines imposed upon them was vividly exhibited. Lady Bell gave us a very able drama concerning a social question in *The Way the Money Goes*.

What native plays have we had by men during the period covered by these four ladies dealing with similar questions? Mr Bernard Shaw has been running amok during this time and before in a kind of "down-with-everything" way, but his philosophy of the stage is as terribly destructive as that of Ibsen, and except in *Widowers' Houses*, and perhaps *Mrs Warren's Profession*, few of his works handle directly matters capable of being dealt with by legislation. Years earlier, in *The Middleman* and *Judah*, Mr Henry Arthur Jones tackled two questions and strikes have been treated more than once—notably in George Moore's clever, interesting, uneven work, *The Strike at Arlingford*. Much further back there was *Man and Wife*, an attack upon the system of irregular marriages still existing in Scotland and some of the States of the Union. Probably there have been some other native works touching more or less directly upon questions of legislative reform within my time, but it is difficult to remember all of them; yet there are many burning matters to-day with ample elements of drama in them.

Probably the Censor is almost blameless in this affair. Since the days of *The Happy Land* he has not allowed politicians to be presented upon the stage; but this has little bearing upon the question. There has been interference with some scenes concerning "ragging" in the army. The office bearer has always been very fidgety as far as the army is concerned; but, in all likelihood, would not prevent the reasonable treatment upon the stage of any of the matters already referred to, though perhaps an Education Bill play would have difficulties in his hands, owing to the introduction of religious topics. It seems curious that the women are keener in seeking to use the stage, a tremendous weapon for the purposes of reform, than men, and the explanation is by no means obvious or necessarily flattering to men.

Some day those whom one may generally designate as Puritans will become sensible of the vast potentialities of drama, and will see that it is foolish to leave all the good tunes to the devil. As a result, no doubt, we shall suffer for a while from a lot of bad plays with a good purpose. Yet there will be a useful infusion of new blood and new ideas, and our drama, instead of running round and round after its tail, will get out of its present little vicious circle and become a living force in the country, instead of a mere medium of entertainment, and of entertainment which rarely has any substantial value from an artistic point of view.

In connexion with these remarks the section "Plays with a Purpose" should be read—if possible. It should be added that Mr Galsworthy's admirable play, *Justice*, has had some effect upon the treatment of prisoners.

CHAPTER VI

THE PHENOMENA OF THE STAGE

The Optics

Thick-and-thin admirers of Duse, an actress of indisputable genius, used to praise her because she dispensed with the "make-up" that other players deem necessary. They saw in this a glorious fidelity to nature. Their position became a little ridiculous when, somewhat later, the actress—possibly in compliance with the advice of critical worshippers—adopted the ordinary devices of the stage and pressed into service the make-up box and even the aid of the wigmaker.

Presumably the change in policy was due to a more careful consideration of the optics of the stage. For it may be assumed that she "made up" in order to counteract the privative effects of the stage lights and appear neither more nor less beautiful and expressive to the public in the playhouse than to her friends in her drawing-room. This leads to the important paradox that in the theatre you must be artificial if you wish to appear natural; that on the stage, verisimilitude is greater truth than truth itself; or, to use the popular oxymoron, you must be "falsely true." In this respect the matter of "make-up" is only an instance of a general law prevailing in all matters theatrical.

Let no one think less of the players on account of it, for it is this fact that entitles the actor to speak of his art and not merely of his craft. It is because the player must select, eliminate, exaggerate, diminish and, in a word, modify his matter but may not be photographic, that he is entitled to call himself an artist.

The term "photographic" used in this sense is rather unfair, for the photographer has become an artist by

recognizing the fact that he too must select, etc. No doubt "make-up" renders other services, and belongs to the artifices as well as the arts of the stage, since it has the advantage in some cases of rendering the plain beautiful—to the discomfiture of stage-door loafers, and, indeed, possesses an abominable democratic effect. Of course, too, it has legitimate value in effecting disguises, in changing young into old—its efforts in the contrary direction, as a rule, are ghastly failures—and in effecting transformations of the exterior of persons. However, "make-up," despite its mysteries, is but a small element in "the optics of the theatre," which term is here used largely—and inaccurately—in relation to all the phenomena covered by the paradox already mentioned.

The player, having counterbalanced with "make-up" the robbery effected by the stage illumination and also by the disadvantage of distance, has to turn himself to the adjustment of other matters. One is this—he must recognize that his author labours under similar conditions, and should not be "photographic."

When the dramatist in the dialogue has exaggerated the play of light and shade, bringing, indeed, legitimately for the sake of effect to his speeches, that energy of chiaroscuro which gives us a pleasure, somewhat distrustful in the pictures of Joseph Wright of Derby, the player must attune his manner in order to make it congruous with the highly seasoned conversation so that there being no clash of methods, no jarring will result.

Every change of convention on the part of the author demands a corresponding change in the actor. Clearly, he must speak verse differently from prose, though there are foes to poetry who beg him to break up the lines and defeat the efforts of the poet; and he must adopt a manner in a blank-verse tragedy unsuitable to a play by Mr Barrie. Moreover, he ought to aim at seeming natural in both. Here is the rub; he must aim at seeming, not being, natural. Obviously, one cannot deliver blank verse naturally; such, however, is the power of make-believe in the audience that if the dramatist and his company can engage the sympathy of the spectators, a fairy tale in rhymed lines, a tragedy in unrhymed verse, a melodrama with flatulent phrases, and a comedy seeking the most exact reproduction of modern life permissible may seem equally plausible, credible, natural.

It is to be noted, too, that the form of artificiality of truth varies not only with the type and quality of the drama but with the nature of the audience. Speaking of our times, one may say that a little greater vigour of contrast is desirable in the provinces than in town, and in the "B" towns than the "A," in the "C" than the "B," and goodness knows what violence is not needed in the "fit-up" shows. There are reasons for believing that our ancestors demanded a more full-blooded style of acting than is relished by their anaemic descendants, and it is possible that such a performance as convinced the eighteenth century of the genius of some of its players might cause laughter nowadays, though neither audience nor actors would deserve censure.

Within the time of even our younger critics there have been at least two tragedians who enjoyed an immense reputation save in town, but failed to win success in the West End of the Metropolis, though outside they held their own against the greatest favourites; and the London critics levelled at them the dreadful charge of "barn-storming"—a charge which some of us no doubt would make against several of the greatest tragedians in our proud records were they to appear to-day and act as in their own times.

It is a feature of the actor's art that its excellence is never absolute. An audience is entitled to say, "What care I how good he be if he seem not good to me?" A performance that does not move the spectators is not only a failure but to some extent a culpable failure, since the actor's art is more utterly ephemeral than any other—possibly by aid of gramophone, biograph, and the like some fairly effective records will be made in the future—but, this consideration apart, he may not even take heed for the morrow. At the moment his mission is to move the particular collection of people before him, and though they may be culpable for not being moved he will not be wholly blameless.

Possibly this is putting the matter a little too harshly, and the observations should be considered as applicable only to a particular "run" and not to an individual night. Doubtless, even thus restricted, it suggests that the player should make a remarkable series of modifications in his methods which are not within the practical politics of the stage; and, indeed, these remarks are pushed purposely too far in order to draw attention to the fact that the actors are prone to consider their own "reading" of a part without reference to the audience, and even, in some cases, to the author. In other words, they are misled by the delusive term "create," so often applied to acting as well as to millinery. The word is inappropriate to the rapidly evanescent. "Original interpreters" is the highest phrase that can be justified.

These observations would be incomplete without some reference to more material aspects of the "optics." For instance, one may comment on the fact that, regardless of seating arrangements, which in almost every theatre cause a considerable number of people to be unable to see the exits on one side or the other, important business is often transacted in the wings, to the intense annoyance of would-be spectators, who are left out in the cold, and of course imagine that what they miss is the plum of the play; also valuable scenes are sometimes played so far back that people in the higher parts of the house are unable to see them properly. This sounds perilously like an invitation to players to take the centre of the stage close to the footlights, but of course the matter is one of degree.

Yet, at the least, it must be urged that nothing, the exact understanding of which is necessary to the audience, should happen much on one side or very far back; to this may be added the suggestion, hardly novel, that the first few minutes of each act should be confined to immaterial affairs; blame the unpunctual—even if you blame unfairly, since, as a rule, the *entr'acte* warning bell is inaudible in most parts of the theatre—but do not make the guiltless suffer by presenting important matters during the time when the stage is half hidden by the people struggling (through a passage as a rule shamefully narrow) to get to their seats. Sardou's precepts may be pushed too far, and we do not need a whole first act of nothing in particular, but facts should be recognized and simple common-sense considered. There is always some trouble during the first few minutes of each act.

Make-up

The word "make-up" is very ugly, but seems irreplaceable, and therefore is employed in the book called "The Art of Theatrical Make-up," by Mr Cavendish Morton, the object of which is to tell players—amateurs as well as professionals—how to make-up. No doubt it will render useful service to the actor—to the actor, since nothing is said in it about the actress and make-up in relation to her.

Thereby hangs something of importance. The actress has held her own against the actor: even the most unkind critic of the fair sex cannot deny that the achievements of women on the stage are as great as the achievements of men, although they have been a shorter time at the game, and have not had so many splendid parts written for them. Yet make-up has been of little assistance to actresses.

Eleanora Duse at the present moment is probably accepted as the greatest living player of the world. Of late years she has, to some extent, used make-up, but with great moderation. One can imagine her tossing aside a book such as Mr Morton's, and asking what on earth it has to do with the art of acting, and I fancy that tremendously rapid speech of hers would be used effectively if she were to read such a sentence as this: "Is not half the battle won when one perfectly physically realizes the character to be impersonated?" By which the author clearly means that half the battle is won when, by the aid of nose-paste or "toupee" paste and grease-paint, powder, crêpe hair, spirit-gum, wig and the like, one has arrived at looking like the character.

Instead of this being half the battle, it does not amount to a tenth. Of course something must be done to counteract the effect of the lighting on the stage, and no one can complain if the players use the well-known devices to heighten their charms; and wigs and false beards and moustaches and whiskers may be serviceable at times; but to take such matters seriously seems an egregious mistake. Indeed, when looking at the result, one is inclined, unconsciously, to use a criticism by employing the phrase, "What a capital make-up." Mr So-and-so enters as Caliban, or Napoleon Bonaparte, or Charles II., or Falstaff. In a few seconds, or it may be minutes, we can identify him without the aid of the programme; and, of course, we say, "what a capital make-up," but the whole thing is merely a Madame Tussaud aspect of drama.

Make-up has comparatively little to do with the capacity of an actor for differentiating his parts. Take Mr Dennis Eadie, who has an extraordinary gift for changing his personality. Those who have seen this admirable actor as Henry Jackson in *The Return of the Prodigal*, as Lord Charles Cantelupe in *Waste*, and Mr Wylder in *Strife*, must admit that changes of voice, of gesture and manner, and general expression of countenance are of greater value than tons of the cleverest make-up.

The service of make-up in its higher branches is merely to render, or, rather, seem to render, actors fit for tasks for which they are physically unsuited. Take for instance, the nose; there is a picture of Mr Morton with flattened nose and enlarged nostrils; he is said to represent Othello. "The nose is first depressed by crossing it near the tip with a silk thread, which is tied at the back of the head. A small piece of kid is placed under the thread, thus keeping it from coming in contact with the skin. The nostrils are built out until the nose has a Moorish appearance."

Now, nobody thinks a whit the worse or less of Mr Forbes Robertson's Othello because he played no tricks with his striking aquiline nose; and the idea that he would have gained anything by flattening it with a bit of silk thread is absurd. What he would have gained would have been a feeling of physical inconvenience during the quiet passages, and terror during the tremendous scenes of passion at the thought that the string might snap.

There are photographs of other noses, built up with nose-paste or, preferably, with "toupee" paste; one is of Falstaff, another of Shylock, and there is also one called "the Professor." In each case the whole nose looks wooden; it may be suggested that in an ordinary way movements of the nose do not play much of a part in expressing emotions, yet we have phrases about swelling nostrils and turning up one's nose that possess some foundation in fact. Further, one can hardly render the nose a dead thing without, to some extent, effecting the mobility of other features. Probably the built-up nose of Coquelin as Cyrano de Bergerac will be thrown in my face; it must, however, be remembered, that apart from his large elastic mouth Coquelin's face was rather wooden, and he relied for expression chiefly on voice, mouth, gesture and movement. No doubt in this particular character there is a necessity, and, therefore, a justification for a built-up nose; but more than one actor has failed to fight successfully against the artificial proboscis of Cyrano.

Used as more than a counteracting or embellishing contrivance, "make-up" is curiously ineffective. Many Napoleons have appeared on the stage, only one of them by a writer capable of even suggesting the distinguishing qualities of the man of genius. In most cases there have been advance paragraphs about the pictures, miniatures, statues, statuettes, medallions, bas-reliefs, etc., consulted by the actor, and concerning the contrivances of the wigmaker, even the bootmaker and tailor. What has been the outcome? Merely that for half-a-minute people have said: "What a clever make-up," and for the rest of the time one has been no more content to accept the player as Jupiter Scapin than if he had washed his face, brushed his hair and acted in his dress clothes.

Does Mr Cavendish Morton think players were really worse off before the latest refinements in make-up were invented? Some of the greatest acting triumphs of the world were accomplished when the players dressed their parts absurdly, trusting almost exclusively to their own powers.

One is forced to wonder to what extent covering the face with the mass of muck hinders the actor in his work. People can be trained to endure it, but it would be interesting to see the difference in the performance of a given part by an actor with an elaborate make-up—false nose, etc.—and by the same actor without. Mr Arthur Bourchier, when growing a beard for the purpose of playing Henry VIII., stated that he would have been embarrassed by a sham beard. Can it be that the triumph that we sometimes see, of the actress over the

actor, is partly due to the fact that she reduces make-up to the minimum?

No one denies the necessity for make-up. When young players have to represent old people it is their duty to take advantage of the advice of experts such as Mr Morton, and every one may find valuable hints in his book. The really important fact is that all should be warned against such a proposition as lies in the hideous sentence, "Is not half the battle won when one perfectly physically realizes the character to be impersonated?"

Gesture

Some years ago, at one of the theatrical clubs, the existence of which is one of the many tokens of the great interest at present taken in the drama, Mr Alfred Robbins, a very able, highly esteemed critic, gave a lecture upon "The Value of Ballet in Dramatic Art," which was illustrated charmingly. For, in order to show how a story could be interpreted without words, Miss Genée, the brilliant dancer, ably assisted by Miss D. Craske, represented the ballet scene from *Nicholas Nickleby*, between the infant phenomenon and the Indian.

There was no little discussion afterwards upon the question whether the art of miming, one of the two main elements of the ballet, is or can be serviceable to the ordinary stage. Several seemed to have the opinion that the art of dumb show is almost useless to the player, the argument being that, as far at least as modern comedies are concerned, so little gesture is used on the stage that training in the mode of employing it is superfluous. The introduction of trouser pockets was said to have destroyed the need for gesture. In such views lie certain dangerous fallacies.

The actor who thinks that by mode of speech and facial display, and without carefully calculated gesture, he can carry through a part in a modern comedy probably is misled by the thought that the English are more sober in gesture than the Latin races: and his contempt for the work of the mime is based on a belief that certain purely conventional gestures, inapplicable save in wordless scenes, constitute the whole materials of the mime's art. The mime certainly has a kind of dumb language with a limited vocabulary, understood, unfortunately, by few English people save those connected with the stage; part of his silent speech has never crept into the common language; yet to sneer at it as conventional is wrong, it is merely a case of certain conventional gestures not having been generally adopted, and therefore remaining unintelligible to the world.

For most of our gestures are conventional. Nearly all peoples understand what the European means when he shakes his head and when he nods it; nevertheless, there are races which use these movements in an exactly opposite sense. The offer to rub noses as a sign of welcome employed by some tribes was misunderstood by early explorers, and when, in friendly spirit, certain tribes stroked the waistcoat of the missionary, he guessed that they were cannibals.

Kissing (in one aspect a matter of gesture) is unused by whole nations, and so, too, is handshaking. It has been said by a traveller that the vulgar operation described by Barham in the line "Put his thumb unto his nose and spread his fingers out" is a mark of courtesy and esteem in one remote nation; nor is putting out the tongue a sign of contempt everywhere. Certain of the gestures of ballet still strictly conventional in England are employed outside the theatre in France. Gesture and facial expression, except so far as mechanically due to emotion, are entirely conventional, though some of the conventions are so old as to have become second nature.

Most people are unaware how largely they adopt the conventions; this unconscious adoption in the end has turned the conventional into the natural. It is the study of this conventional-natural which enables the mime to accomplish remarkable feats; combining it with simple descriptive movements, and a few of the gestures still purely conventional in England, Signor Rossi, in *A Pierrot's Life*, was able to delight our audiences by his dumb-show narration of the complicated tale of the two pigeons, and Signora Litini in the same piece showed with subtlety a whole gamut of emotions. Miss Genée, at the Empire, without uttering a sound, used to be more eloquent than many of our players with whole lengths of dialogue. To a great extent Duse fascinates most playgoers by her plastic art, since they do not understand her speech.

Now, to employ to its full extent the art of the mime in conjunction with spoken speech would be absurd. The light and shade in the speech of the most "natural" actor—say, Mr Charles Hawtrey—is violently exaggerated on account of the peculiar acoustics of the theatre; amongst other things, the player has to address those far off in the galleries as well as those close to in the stalls, and therefore his work requires a series of compromises like that of a piano-tuner anxious to avoid "wolves" or a politician eager to win votes. Moreover, on account of the lack of speech the plastic art of the mime involves great exaggeration in the conventional-natural gestures and also in the movements and facial expression intended to represent those mechanically caused by emotion.

It is therefore necessary for the actor to mime in a modified and restrained fashion, abandoning, of course, all the still purely conventional and showing much moderation in the rest. When he nicely combines expression by the voice with expression by face, gesture and pose the result is very valuable. Few can do this, and the failure is nearly always in respect of gesture, which is misused or insufficiently employed. A study of the great statues and pictures, and such works as those of Sir Charles Bell, Lavater, Duchesne, Gratiolet and Darwin has enabled the mime to collect a series of rules for the expression of emotions. How rash of the player to trust entirely to his own ideas, and not avail himself of the knowledge of others! Some may regard such conduct as exhibiting originality: it is, however, a sad waste of time to try to find out for oneself what others are willing and able to teach, and there is a great risk of error.

Moreover, the mime teaches grace of movement and pose, and enables the player to employ usefully the limbs which as a rule seem an encumbrance to him. The poor ladies have not even trouser-pockets wherein to hide the hands, the existence of which embarrasses them, but they can conceal the legs, which so often are troublesome to the actor.

The restlessness of English acting—one of its worst faults—is, I believe, due to the player feeling half-consciously that he does not know what to do when he is not speaking. In a conversation scene, during which two finely trained artists would not leave their seats, our players generally appear to be having a game of musical chairs; and actors could be named who take their "constitutionals" on the stage. Moreover, one very rarely sees a player listening effectively, yet I have watched an actor who, though silent during a long speech, has by means of finely studied poses and nicely calculated gestures greatly increased the force of the speech to which he was supposed to be listening. No doubt all actors and actresses seek the aid of pose and gesture and get advice from stage-managers: very often the case is one of the blind leading the blind.

It will be objected that a study of such a system may tend to make the player mechanical, and also to cause all the members of a company to resemble one another too greatly: there is some truth in the objection. Still, this is an abuse not inseparable from the use. The intelligent mime fully recognizes the fact that the gestures proper to the members of one class of people are not necessarily suitable to those of another, and that there are individual differences as well. He distinguishes between the sober, and therefore striking, gesture of the Englishman and the unimpressive gesticulation of the meridional; between the poses of the king and attitudes of the peasant, and so on.

The highly trained artist knows how, upon rare occasions, to produce a great effect by conscious breach of a rule. To argue against a use from a *needless* abuse is not legitimate, a proposition dear to Jeremy Bentham. There is also a grave fallacy in the idea that gesture is less important in presenting an Englishman than a member of a gesticulative race, for vehement gesture is impressive in direct proportion to its rarity, and effects have been produced by the fine, slight movement of one of our actresses at a critical moment which surpassed in force anything possible if she had been lavish in gesture throughout. Need it be added that the training of the body insisted upon by the mime would cause some of our players to move more gracefully on the stage? Several of our popular players walk as if they had hired their limbs and not had time to become accustomed to them.

Scenery at the French Plays

One might almost say there is none. A foreign management at the New Royalty Theatre produced a number of works mounted in a fashion that would horrify an ordinary West End London manager, and yet the rather daring season was really successful. So much the better. Probably if the cost of production of each play had been ten times greater nobody's pleasure would have been appreciably increased and the receipts would not have advanced perceptibly. It is doubtful whether the scenery for the baker's dozen or so of plays cost as much as is often expended by our managers on a single work.

Is there no lesson in this? Why, if an audience can be attracted, interested, and even delighted in the Soho house, though play and players are not aided by the expenditure of barrels of money on the mounting, should it be deemed necessary to employ a small fortune every time a work is presented by our native managers? As far as I can judge, the French season, although triumphant, was not marked by the appearance of any prodigious star with whom we were not already familiar, nor were the new pieces of astounding quality.

The truth is that the assistance given by costly mounting is very little. The scene which by its magnificence causes a gasp of surprise loses all its effect after two or three minutes, and unless the play and acting are really meritorious the audience is quite as much bored when the mounting is splendid as when it is merely decent. Possibly it is even more bored; unwittingly it is affected by a sense of disproportion.

We all know that jewellery does not embellish a plain woman; that, on the contrary, after a minute or two, one ceases to gaze on the gewgaws and then the sight of the ugly face comes as something of a shock. Consider the jarring effect of a noble pearl necklace upon a scraggy neck, and, changing the figure, think how disappointing is a bad dinner served beautifully. There is a French phrase concerning a scanty meal on a flower-decked table that seems in point: *Il m'a invité à brouter et je l'ai envoye paître*. Sydney Smith, after a mean dinner served in a gorgeous room, observed that he would prefer "a little less gilding and a little more carving."

Mr H.B. Irving, in a lecture given at the Royal Institution, ascribed the alleged pre-eminence of actors during the Garrick period to the weakness of the current drama and the economy in stage-mounting, two matters that forced the players to tremendous exertion in order to hold the house, which, by the way, he believes to have been very finely critical. An audience is more truly observant of plays and playing when its attention is not distracted by considering the cost of the costumes, by wondering if the marble pillars are solid, by curiosity as to how the lighting effects are contrived, and by asking whether the play will run long enough to earn its initial cost.

Whether the large sums of money expended produce an effect agreeable to the trained eye is a little outside the topic. Yet it must be suggested that such beauty as the costly stage pictures present generally belongs to the category of the very obvious. This is not surprising; if a great deal of money is spent in order to produce a gorgeous spectacle, common-sense demands that the result should be to the taste of a vast number of people, otherwise the management must lose money. It would be idle to pretend that there are very many playgoers who possess fine taste, consequently the money must be lavished in order to delight people with a more or less uncultivated taste. No doubt a great deal of money may be spent on quiet details, and sometimes is, without the attention of the ordinary playgoer being drawn to the expenditure, but the case is exceptional. In plain English, it very rarely happens that the extravagant sums employed in mounting plays produce a beauty that appeals successfully to any people save those whose ideas of the pictorial art are bounded by the exhibitions of the Royal Academy. Moreover, consideration is paid to the fact that there are Philistines who will admire a thing merely because they believe it to be costly.

Certainly there is much to be said on the other side, or at least a great deal is urged by people who believe what they say. It has been pretended that Shakespeare would have been delighted by such productions of his works as we have seen in modern times, and have rejoiced in the pictures contrived by the scene-painter, costumier and others working under the direction of the producer. To this it has been objected that, though the pictures might have pleased him, he would have been disgusted by the fact that a good many of his beautiful lines have to be cut because of the length of *entr'actes* and occasional pieces of stage business designed in order to draw the attention of the audience to the beauty of the scenery.

The reply is made that a large quantity of the most famous passages in Shakespeare are descriptive of scenery, and would not have been written but for the fact that he had no other means of conveying his ideas to the audience. If there be any truth in this, one may be very thankful for the fact which coerced him into his word-painting. Certainly the world has profited by this compulsion, for millions who have never and will never see the theatre's efforts to represent Shakespeare's pictures have had infinite pleasure from the author's successful endeavours to realize his ideas by the force of words.

As I have already mentioned, Mr H.B. Irving ascribes the alleged superiority of the Garrick-period actors to their lacking the help of the fine scenery of notable contemporary dramas. It would seem to follow that in his opinion the alleged weakness of modern acting is due to the fact that the players rely too much upon the plays and scenery. Upon this aspect of the matter no opinion need be offered, but it may be said confidently that Mr Irving's theory applies to dramatists, and that the existing playwrights unconsciously become somewhat less self-reliant because they have such assistance from the producers.

The art of the theatre is the art of illusion and also of compromise, and no rule connected with the stage can be pushed quite home to its apparent logical conclusions: therefore one must have some amount of appropriate scenery, and costumes may not be flagrantly incongruous; but when once these modest demands have been satisfied the audience will be well content with mounting in which nothing more is involved if the play be well written and acted, and agreeable in style to its taste; and we know very well that some of the longest runs have been enjoyed by works produced at little cost.

The New Royalty productions would not have pleased people any the more by having money lavished upon scenery. In one or two cases, for a moment or two some of us smiled a little unkindly at the black cloth and wings, and yet after a minute or two we ceased to notice them, with the result that the management has been able to save its money in the individual works and to produce a large number of pieces in a short time. Putting aside plays merely intended for spectacular effect, after a few hundred pounds have been spent managers do not get the benefit to the extent of more than a shilling in the pound or so of the really enormous sums expended upon plays.

Stage Costumes

There is a story concerning an enthusiastic collector who devoted almost a fortune and nearly a lifetime to decorating and furnishing his drawing-room so that it should resemble perfectly a Louis XV. *salon*. He invited an expert to visit it and express his opinion. The critic came, inspected, left the room, and locked the door; then he said, "It is perfect," and promptly threw the key into the moat. "Why did you do that?" asked the collector. "For fear," replied the expert, "lest anybody should spoil the effect of your *salon* by entering it in modern costume inharmonious with it." There is another tale about a hostess who wept sorely because the effect of her dinner-table decoration was marred by the appearance of a lady in a costume of pillar-box vermilion. These stories are entirely untrue, and were invented by "G.F.S.": nevertheless, they have a moral when applied to the stage.

Of course it is very rash for a male, unless he happens to be a man milliner, to write about the costumes of actresses; and we leave untouched the clothes of the actor, lest our own and their lack of style should be put forward as a ground for disqualification. Still it is impossible to avoid noticing the dresses of the ladies upon the stage; it would even be bad manners not to do so, seeing how much trouble the dear creatures take to please our eyes, for we are too gallant or vain to believe the cynical idea that they only dress to crush one another.

After noticing them, it is amusing and amazing to read the newspaper articles generally called "Dresses at the * * * Theatre" which appear after a *première*. Of course exception is made of the articles written for a paper necessarily nameless. Even with good opera-glasses one can yet never detect a tenth of the details described in these articles, and at times it appears that the writers suffer from colour-blindness, for they often differ utterly as to the colours of the gowns; perhaps it is more modern to call them "frocks."

There is, however, a simple explanation. The clothes critics have described their subjects from an inspection at the milliner's or modiste's or in dressing-rooms, and thus have noticed the minutiae invisible across the footlights, and recorded colours which have changed when viewed in another light. Moreover, they never suggest that the dresses are ugly, or clash with one another; partly, no doubt, because their ideal of criticism has for foundation the epitaph upon an alleged dramatic critic to the effect that he had never caused an actor's wife to shed a tear, and partly for the reason that they do not see the dresses in relation to one another or from the point of view of an audience on the other side of the orchestra. Even less charitable explanations might be made.

The scene-painter works with a broad brush; he knows that microscopic detail would be wasted, and worse than wasted, for it would cause a muddy effect. Sometimes, but too rarely, he is even a believer in pure colour. The stage *modiste* has other theories, or perhaps none. Instead of seeing that all demanded or permitted by the optics of the stage lies in line and colour, she breaks up line by ridiculous ribbon, foolish flounces and impertinent bows, and the dresses in colouring often "swear at one another." Even the translated French phrase is not quite strong enough to indicate the discord. Does she ever consider the

costumes in relation to the scenery? Sometimes we see frocks in tender hues against richly toned scenes that make them appear mere shades of dirty yellows, blues and pinks. At others a cool, tranquilly pleasing background is degraded to mere dulness in consequence of the gaudy gowns in front of it. Does the word *repoussoir* mean any thing to her? Perhaps she is unacquainted with the meaning of it although she possesses a jargon of French as staggering as that of a menu in a British hotel.

There are other crimes. It has been said that your fashionable milliner sometimes "tries it on the dog." It is hinted that she makes upon the beautiful ladies of the stage experiments which she dare not risk upon her more exalted patrons. If this be true it will explain the fact that many an actress who is beautiful outside the theatre seems plain on the boards because her costume does not suit her style, because her figure is sacrificed for the sake of the frock, because dainty little features are overwhelmed by gowns of strident colour and overshadowed by terrific headgear. The coiffeur is often to be blamed. Questions of "make-up" may be concerned with the case.

The question, like all questions, has another side. These remarks may be answered with some force by saying that the illusion of the stage would disappear if all the costumes in a play were harmonious, since no one could pretend that all the characters are likely to have dressed themselves in order to agree with the colouring of the scenery, or to have chosen costumes in order to harmonize with one another.

The cynic would even hint that probably if the dear ladies thought of the matter at all they would try to chose frocks likely to crush those of their friends, and that no one going into society would venture to use subtle shades or tranquil tints for fear of suffering like the painters of delicate pictures at the hands of the waggish Hanging Committee of the Royal Academy, which loves to put a work shrieking with vigorous colour by the side of a placid canvas that appears insipid by reason of the contrast. The reply to this answer is that we have hardly reached a degree of truth to life which renders it pertinent—and probably never will. Certainly there might be a noticeable fault if all the dresses of ladies of different families obviously showed the design and *facture* of one modiste. This could easily be avoided without prejudice to the point of harmony in colour and congruity of line.

Is it extravagant to hope that some day a dress rehearsal will be a rehearsal of dresses at which some person of taste—everyone would accept Mr Wilhelm—will see all the frocks actually worn by the actresses upon the stage under the ordinary lighting conditions, against the scenery intended to be employed and then point out what is necessary to produce a real harmony of colour and also to take full advantage of, and in some cases enhance, the beauty of face and form possessed by the ladies who are to appear in the play?

One more point may be touched upon. Stage managers should pay more attention to suitability of costume and require actresses to make sacrifices repugnant to their natural and desirable instinct for coquettishness. One often sees a player in a costume utterly inconsistent with the poverty of the character misrepresented by her, particularly if she is acting the part of a peasant or poor shopgirl and the like, when her hair will show that it has been dressed by a coiffeur at a cost that would be unpayable by the character. Things like this destroy the illusion of the stage. It may be noted that in this respect the French and German actresses behave better than ours, and accept, doubtless with reluctance, a sacrifice of personal charm for sake of character too rarely seen upon our stage. A last matter—why is it supposed that almost all the characters in a play are wearing new clothes on a first night?

Colour

Some time ago a musical comedy was produced the notices upon which were a little amazing. Several were impolite about the book, others unfriendly to the music; but almost all agreed that the scenery and costumes were of remarkable beauty. Now, in the first act an excellent opportunity for picturesque mounting had been wasted, and the setting of the second act was deplorable. It was a great blaze of gold and yellow, which endured for about an hour and a half, with, of course, some little relief here and there, and it fatigued some eyes and caused some headaches. No doubt we were in the minority.

It may be that most people are not sensitive to colour; any of our senses may be irresponsive. A friend of mine puts a lot of cayenne pepper and mustard and Worcester sauce on toasted cheese; obviously he has a dull palate. There are people to whom nothing in the way of music appeals except violent tunes. We know that colour-blindness in different degrees is the common lot; very possibly what to the sensitive seems a picture rich in tender colour, to the mass appears dull drab; and the scene whose shrieking gorgeousness oppresses the eye and brain of the artist is subtle to the Philistine—it is difficult to know. Who can imagine a picture gallery as seen by the person who suffers even mildly from colour-blindness? There are those who have a dull sense of smell, and the case has happened of a girl only stopped by accident from going to a ball decked in flowers that looked pretty and smelt abominably.

This raises rather a large question about stage-mounting; if the majority are not sensitive, then business instinct demands that the colour-scheme should be crude. Some time ago much admiration was expressed in the press at the beauty of a ballet designed by Mr Wilhelm, a real colourist, who is able not only to produce lovely delicate effects but to present pictures of vivid gorgeous colour so strong and subtle as to delight the artist and the Philistine. The same phrases that had been bestowed upon the Empire ballet were lavished by the same writers upon an entertainment at another house at which, in fact, there was a horrible debauch of crude, yelping, clashing colours.

The matter is difficult for the managers, or at least for those of them who have a sense of colour. In one way their position is easy enough; if they spend a lot of money on the dress and scenery, the press, with rare exceptions, will gush about the beauty of the setting, however vicious it may be. The Englishman who uses violent bottled sauces to destroy the delicate flavour of a sole or to add taste to toasted cheese rules the roast. People often proclaim that they like "colour"—by "colour" they mean bright, showy colours. Their taste

is that of the negro; give him plenty of gaudy red and yellow and he is happy.

In modern comedies the difficulty might be avoided, since as a rule modern people in society do not employ violent colours, and the modern interiors in most instances exhibit agreeably the influence of the so-called aesthetic craze. Yet we have plenty of horrors. Ellen Terry in her interesting biography says that she never settled on her dresses without seeing whether they would harmonize with the scenery. This wisdom, alas! is rarely shown, and we very often see a charming interior ruined by gowns hostile to it in colour.

The question of form in the costumes is somewhat different; yet one cannot pass from it without expressing regret that the stage is so weak-minded as to permit itself to be the subject of the maddest experiments of milliners, and to accept tamely their *rossignols*. A few of our actresses know how to dress and to wear their gowns; nobody except the milliners seems to look after the others, and they form the majority. In many instances, no doubt, the ladies in the cast ought not to be blamed: they have a very restricted choice, if any. Lately there was a case where a handsome sum of money was put up by a syndicate for the ladies' costumes in a play, and nine-tenths of it was appropriated by the powerful leading lady, leaving for the others a ridiculous amount.

It is in romantic comedy we suffer most. To begin with, one may assert the general proposition that the sense of pictorial art on the stage is entirely conventional and academic; of course there are exceptional cases—rare, alas! The ideal seems to be to reach chromo-lithographic effects and the beauties of the old-fashioned valentine; for the suggestive, the mysterious, the imaginative little affection is shown. The real tub has developed into the real tree with real blossoms and real leaves wired on, not a thing regarded as a matter of form and colour, but as a realistic imitation of a natural object. Broad effects are frittered away by masses of irritating detail, the production of which costs a great deal of money.

Scenes and costumes are designed without due consideration of the fact that they are to be before our eyes for a long time. Occasionally we are pleased by a striking picture for five minutes, during which the play is forgotten; then the play asserts itself and the money spent on the mounting ceases to bear fruit, and a little later on the vivid spectacular effect, charming for five minutes, becomes trying by reason of its quality, and it reasserts itself aggressively, to the hurt of the play. We have gorgeous costumes which, when first presented and grouped, produce beautiful effects; afterwards costumes inharmonious with them are introduced, the grouping is altered, and the colour-scheme destroyed; then the question comes into mind, How is it that all these characters have brand-new costumes, although the circumstances of the drama show that most of the dresses would be torn or dirty or faded? It may be an answer that this convention is so firmly established as not to be absurd; but the convention is constantly violated where it would be too blatantly ridiculous by somebody presenting himself with torn or dirtied or faded costume. How much more beautiful as a rule the costumes become after the play has run a while!

From the colour point of view, it was the blessing of the romantic period that the ruck and run of people had to wear their velvets and silks and satins till time and wear and tear had toned down and harmonized the colours. It must be remembered, too, that in the evening they were seen under favourable circumstances, for the lights and shades must have been strong, although the lighting was feeble before the use of gas was discovered and before the oil-wells were found that have made half the population of the United States slaves to a few plutocrats.

Also, "shoddy" had not been invented, nor had coal-tar dyes been discovered by the English and exploited by the Germans now groaning over the wise tyranny of the provisions of the new Patent Act, to which ignorant people have applied the offensive term "Protectionist." Shoddy treated with aniline dyes can produce effects that overwhelm the colours of the honest old materials which owed their hues to the efforts of the vegetable and the insect. A modern manufacturer is proud when his scarlet shoddy shrieks like a steam siren. Unfortunately some of the managers seem to like the shriek.

Stage Meals

An undistinguished foreigner from France was talking the other day about the English stage, of which apparently he had seen a good deal. After being asked many searching questions put in the hopes of eliciting material for "copy" it was discovered that what he most admired in our theatre is the way in which stage meals are treated. In the first place, he was astonished at the "exquisite distinction" displayed by the players in eating them. The "perfect elegance" which one actress exhibited in consuming an egg had fascinated him and he stated with conviction that he could have spent a happy evening simply watching her eat these ill-starred hopes of chickens. It was pointed out that the management could hardly afford to pay her a sufficient salary for the strain on her digestive faculties, and also that the eggs—real Boat Race eggs, not election missiles—cost something.

He is quite an undistinguished person and utterly *bourgeois*, though he has written some successful funny farces which as yet have not suffered the dishonour of adaptation, and during his many visits to London has acquired an even more perfect ignorance of the English and their ways than if he had never paid tribute to Neptune; for he always stays at a little French hotel where there is absolutely nothing British, not even the meat or the matches or the washing arrangements.

Now, if there is one matter of manners in which we are better than the people of the Continent it is in our mode of eating. How this has come about it is difficult to say. One knows that good French families sometimes engage English nursery governesses in order that the children may be brought up to feed themselves daintily, and that people in good society on the other side of the streak certainly commit acts at dinner which are rather ugly. Goodness knows what is the reason. Possibly the cynic would discover in our greater refinement a curious form of snobbishness, the sort of timidity about accomplishing before other people a natural function which in other aspects of life is certainly carried too far by us.

We have an extraordinary amount of eating nowadays upon the stage, managed very badly. In the old days, when people got through a banquet, consisting chiefly of a special brand of cardboard chicken, a real *dîner à la carte* at the present time only used in pantomime, washed down by copious draughts of nothing from gilded *papier-maché* goblets which refuse to make the chink of metal, and spent no more than five minutes over the whole affair, it was recognized that the banquet was a mere convention; nobody pretended to believe in any aspect of it, and therefore no one questioned its verisimilitude.

In the twentieth century real food is consumed, the diet being chiefly vegetarian, and damp decoctions are drunk with gusto. Occasionally, it is said, Persian sherbet, or lemon kali, once joys of our youth, give a theatrical fizziness to toast and water in bottles with deceitful lordly labels. Unfortunately, except in *The Man from Blankley's*, these real things are consumed as fast as a midday meal at an American boarding-house, with the result that they are a mixture of realism and convention profoundly unconvincing. Art would be better served by the old-fashioned method, for the playgoer is more willing to concede a whole than a half "make-belief."

One amusing result of the fact that we have so many adaptations from the French is that not only are the names abominably mispronounced—which can hardly be avoided—but that the efforts at representing the foreign feeding as a rule are all wrong. Simili-champagne is consumed where no Frenchman would dream of drinking "fizz," for across the Channel the detestable snobbishness of the English in relation to champagne is imitated chiefly by the modern plutocracy and by the prosperous members of what is alleged to be the most ancient, if hardly the most honourable, of professions. When we see a French company in a play, the leading lady solemnly wipes the inside of her glass with her napkin, occasionally goes a little further and breathes into it—breathes rather dampishly. In the subsequent English version the leading actress is far too much of a lady to do anything of the kind. The foreigners cut up everything on their plates, clean their knives upon the bread, sometimes before and sometimes afterwards scooping out the salt with them, and then lay them by for the next dish. Of course the English company is not guilty of such solecisms.

The original troupe stuffs a napkin, half-way in size between a bath-towel and a tablecloth, inside its neck-band so as to protect its clothes against the little *taches* concerning which, as a rule, it is more anxious in relation to its costume than its character—in the play; but our better-bred players ignore this, and merely spread their "serviettes" upon their unimperilled knees. Has anyone ever seen a British player, even when he called himself "Ongri" or "Gontrang," wipe his plate with a piece of bread and swallow the latter rapturously?

It may be contended that the English players are wise, perhaps without knowing it. Unadulterated truth sometimes comes off second best in the theatre, as is proved by the ancient story of the actor who was hissed because instead of imitating the squeaks of a pig he pinched the tail of a real porker in a poke; upon the stage a little truth is sometimes dangerous, a great deal often fatal. As a last word, in these as in all other germane matters our British productions are vastly more accurate than those that come from the other side of the Atlantic. It may be the fact that the good Americans, when they die, go to Paris; they do not take the trouble to learn anything beforehand concerning the French. This, however, is not remarkable; there are very few really French people in Paris.

CHAPTER VII

THE MORALITY OF OUR DRAMA

Mr Harry Lauder on the Morals of our Drama

A little while ago Mr Harry Lauder made some statements to a representative of *The Daily Chronicle* concerning the relations between music-halls and theatres. Some readers may be aware that Mr Harry Lauder is a popular music-hall singer, and by many people regarded as the chief of his calling. Consequently his utterances have a little importance.

According to Mr Lauder a gulf exists between the theatres and the music-halls, and it is due to the fact that the playhouses traffic in immorality and the halls are pure. The variety theatres shudder at the thought of presenting plays that introduce people who are or have been unduly intimate without marriage. Let us use the words of the stern moralist: "Now, take certain plays produced in certain theatres. The curtain rises, and you ask yourself the question, 'Will they marry?'" The attitude reminds one a little of the dear ladies at the seaside who use prism field-glasses in order to be sure whether the costumes of the bathers are really indecent. "Sometimes you think, 'Are they married?' In that play there is throughout a suggestiveness which would not be allowed in a music-hall."

Ye gods and little Lauder, how beautiful and simple is the morality of the music-hall! "Be married and you will be virtuous" seems to sum it up. From the Lauder point of view there are no difficult questions of morality; there are sheep and there are goats, but no hybrids, and we ought never to refer to the goats in public. There are no problem plays, for there are no problems; everything is plain and easy. Intimate relations between people not married to one another are beyond discussion, and it is vulgar to present such law-breakers upon the stage.

The great Lauder attacks Mr Barrie; he complains of *What Every Woman Knows*. It has one fault, for "there

is a touch of immorality in it which does not exist, as he must know, in the true character of a Scotsman. The man going away with another woman is the only part of the play which I did not like; and it was quite unnecessary. Jimmy Barrie is a far cleverer man than he thinks he is, but I am sorry for this piece." Poor Mr Barrie, the great Lauder is sorry for you. Still, it must be some comfort for you to know that the great illustrious immortal Lauder calls you "Jimmy."

Let us dig a little deeper into the gold-mine. It is very touching to see the confidence of Mr Lauder in the virtue of his fellow-countrymen. According to him, "no touch of immorality exists in the true character of a Scotsman." Yet it is said that the streets of bonnie Glasgow and other great towns of virtuous Scotland are not free from the presence of the hapless followers of Rahab, but perhaps they are only there for the entertainment of English visitors.

According to the last edition of *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, the proportion of illegitimate births in Scotland to legitimate is nearly twice the proportion in England, and almost three times as great as that in Ireland. No doubt this, again, is due to the foul Saxon. It is wonderful that the Scots do not prevent us from coming into their virtuous country. Yet an idea comes to mind—uncharitable, no doubt. Some people have thought it an ugly touch in Mr Barrie's play when one of Maggie's brothers hissed the term of reproach "Englishman" to John Shand on discovering his faithlessness to his wife. It seemed a brutal charge of Pharisaism to the minds of us benighted Southerners. Was the author making an anticipatory hit at Mr Lauder?

Somewhat later in the interview are these words: "Now, when you go to the theatre you get the good and the bad characters, and I contend that there is no necessity to show the bad." Alas! poor Shakespeare, Lauder obliterates you with a sentence, and under his severe censure your warmest admirers should try to save your reputation by accepting the view that Bacon wrote the plays—and the poems as well. It would be thrilling to have a drama in which all the characters were good, but how would the dramatists construct their plots without the use of a villain?

However, to be just to Mr Lauder, by badness of character he means lack of reverence for chastity. It is a curious point of view that involves the banishment from the stage of all questions concerning right and wrong in the traffic between man and woman, which condemns *What Every Woman Knows* as immoral. People used to think that the music-hall stage might be a kind of feeding-ground for drama, might breed playgoers capable of taking the view that drama has other functions than merely that of amusing; but, if the illustrious Lauder is correct, the music-halls stand aloof. Even the ladies of the promenade would be shocked by *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, fly blushing from *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith*, and put ashes on their dyed hair if *Iris* were offered to them. What a topsy-turvydom the entertainment world seems when a popular star ventures to censure in a great daily paper the modern drama of the country and takes himself quite seriously in urging the superiority of the music-halls in taste and morality to the theatres!

Mr Lauder, in addition to his curious ideas about drama from a moral point of view, seems to have strange opinions concerning the nature of plays. He says: "Moreover, in a theatre only one or two stars appear, and they appear only now and again; otherwise they would not shine! If they were always on the stage there would be a sameness in the performance. And the other members of the company are only playing up to these stars, giving so much padding to the entertainment. Little wonder that the public is not satisfied with the play of to-day." If we understand this correctly, and we have honestly tried to do so, it involves a complete misunderstanding as to the nature of drama, and means that Mr Lauder thinks that its whole purpose is to provide star acting parts, and that, since plays cannot be written in which all the characters are star parts, drama is a poor sort of stuff of no great interest. In his calling, of course, all are stars, though, perhaps, he would hardly admit that all are of equal brilliance; and one fancies that he regards as unacceptable any entertainment during which part of the stage is occupied by persons receiving no greater salary than that of a county court judge.

Of course, every man is entitled to his own point of view, and if Mr Lauder considers that his turns are preferable to drama, he is quite right to say so. There are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of persons to whom his performances represent the summit of art; they, of course, are entitled to their opinions.

There is no reason for supposing that his remarks are not uttered in good faith. Indeed, it is their obviously complacent sincerity which renders them so exquisitely comic. If he were half as funny on the stage as he is in cold print, the whole world would be at his feet. From one point of view his utterances are quite unimportant: to the world outside the music-hall they only represent the unintentional humours of a man without weight, save in his branch of his calling; but, so far as they are the opinions of the variety stage, the matter is serious, since it suggests that the modern drama has an enemy, not a friend, in the music-halls, and an enemy which works under such unfair conditions of advantage and is so powerfully organised that it may become the duty of the theatre to wage a fierce war upon it.

No great change would be needed in the conduct of the playhouses in London to enable them to cut into the music-halls. The sympathy with the music-halls of those who have been advocating free trade in drama may become exhausted, and, on the other hand, a system may be devised under which the theatres take music-hall licences, and then the inflated salaries which have led to swollen heads will soon shrink.

Double Entente

The correspondence provoked concerning Mr Harry Lauder and his views about the drama and the music-halls was a little disappointing owing to its oneness. The music-hall performer in one respect resembled St Athanasius. A passage in a letter on the topic was surprising. Miss Violet Vanbrugh said: "The English language, too, is so difficult; it leaves so little to the imagination. It seems to come down definitely, in a fearfully flat-footed fashion. The French dramatist finds his task made easy, as his language can suggest simply without definitely stating, more easily than can be done in English."

This opinion is surprising. It would be amazing if it were correct, seeing the enormous wealth of our language in words and forms of expression, and the fact that for the best part of a century our dramatists lived chiefly on "hints," upon suggesting more than they durst say. The very word "hint" is significant. We use it frequently; who can find a word in the French language that exactly represents it? One may add that we have English equivalents for most, perhaps all, of the French phrases that have to serve for our handy word "hint." When one recollects the hundreds of adaptations of more or less indelicate or indecent French plays seen on our boards, the idea that it is difficult for the English expert to say nasty things nicely seems absurd. Our journalists have used more often the incorrect phrase *double entendre* than the French critics the phrase *double entente*, which is the term that our writers intend to employ.

Were it otherwise, one would be amazed. The French always have been, and still are, very candid in the use of language; whilst we for a long time past have been prudish to an extent sometimes comic. Readers of Laurence Sterne can hardly deny that the English tongue enables one to be indelicate in idea whilst decent in expression, and it is noteworthy that this writer, so often censured for the immodest salt of his wit, is one of those who comment with surprise upon the simple frankness of the French of his time. There is an episode in "Tristram Shandy," or "The Sentimental Journey" concerning a lady, the author and a carriage drive, which shows this very well; but the printers would strike if asked to set it up in these chaste pages.

Our own native prudery, enriched by a quantity imported from the United States, has led to an immense hypocrisy of language, and consequently to an extraordinary facility in hinting unseemly ideas which on the French stage would be expressed bluntly. It is true that, so far as love is concerned, the French have invented a funny little language of prudery for the benefit of schoolgirls, and countless books have been printed, and received the benediction of Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Tours, in which the word *tambour* is printed instead of the word *amour*, and so on. By-the-by, it is rather quaint that the Archbishop of Tours should be chosen as godfather of these superchaste books, seeing that Touraine has a rather famous reputation for naughty stories, and Balzac alleges that his naughty "Contes Drolatiques" are "Colliges ez Abbayes de Touraine." It would be remarkable if the French tongue lent itself as easily as ours to the *double entente*.

We have a far larger vocabulary available and in common use, and we possess slang not only of the different nations constituting the United Kingdom, but also slang from the United States, and from our Colonies, whilst we have a lawlessness in the use of our language not permitted to the French. There are disadvantages as well as advantages from this, for as a result our tongue is abominably rich in ambiguities, and it is a common observation that French scientific works are clearer than ours, not only because the nation is more logical, but also on account of the fact that the language is more precise. Some people, no doubt, fancy that the French dramatists are conveying indelicate ideas delicately, because they do not exactly understand what is being said or sung. Remarks have been made about the subtlety of French after speeches and songs which, if literally translated, would have cleared the house. "*Ne rien comprendre c'est tout gober*" is a convenient twist of language. Did not Yvette Guilbert sing publicly in London the song with the refrain "*Hors du mariage*" ... we must stop there.

Our stage has suffered because our dramatists have been able to get much of the indelicate fun out of French farces by using, hypocritically, decent phrases which all parties understand in a bad sense whilst pretending to see nothing shocking in them; for without this elasticity of our tongue British playwrights would have been thrown upon their own resources. Nowadays our playwrights have to some extent abandoned their subservience to France, and it is noticeable that those who take their work seriously, and deal with the difficult questions of life sincerely, are showing a tendency to abandon the language of suggestion, to give up hinting, and to avoid the *double entente*. The result is that many prudes are shocked, and people who have no real objection to certain subjects or ideas denounce plays embodying them because this hypocrisy of language has been abandoned.

The Censor, of course, is one obstacle to plain speaking. He and his office are the superb representatives of English cant, hypocrisy and prudery, and one advantage that must follow from the abolition, if it comes, will be the ousting of the comedy of indecent suggestion by the drama of honest candour. He possesses his little vocabulary in which *tambour* passes for *amour*, and in fact his office has been worked on the ostrich head-in-the-sand system for many years past. The chief duty of the official has been to prevent people from calling a spade a spade, and most, though not all, of the pieces banned would have obtained a licence if in place of straightforward phrase the author had employed some hypocritical, prudish suggestion.

Who doubts that a licensed English version of *Monna Vanna* could have been prepared, although fully giving to the audience the meaning of the awful line, "*Nue sous son manteau*"? One may doubt the comic story that Mr Redford mistook the *sous* for *sans*. The motto for the office, if it has a crest, should be the famous line from a music-hall song: "It ain't exac'ly wot 'e sez, it's the narsty way 'e sez it."

No wonder foreigners are puzzled by our theatre. The Parisian sees a Palais Royal farce played before an audience of which many members are girls in the bread-and-butter stage. In his great city maidens are—or, at least, were—not allowed to enter the theatre so long famous for its naughty farces. He gasps; he wonders whether the English *mees* is as innocent as she looks—or used to look—and does not know the *perfidie* tongue of the *perfidie Albion* well enough to be aware that nothing shocking is said, and that it is pretended that the *cocotte* is a mere kindly friend, the *collage* a trifling flirtation, the *debauche* a viceless lark, and that the foulest conduct of husband or wife does not reach a real breach of the commandment more often broken in England than the rest of the sacred ten.

The real sin of the Censor's office lies as much in what it permits as in what it forbids; and a growing sense of decency in the public is displacing prudery so that the abolition of the office will not cause the ill-results announced by the managers, who regard the existence of the Censor as valuable to them, because it frees them from responsibility and enables them to gratify the taste of the prurient prude, the person who revels in and blushes at the indelicacy of his own thoughts.

Moral Effect on Audience

There was quite a pretty hubbub in theatredom caused by a circular letter of "The Church Pastoral Aid Society," calling upon incumbents and curates to regard theatrical performances as "a serious menace to the spiritual influence of the Church," and suggesting that in future they should refuse to take money raised by means of theatrical performances, or by bazaars or whist-drives or dances. Of course, all people connected with the theatres were very indignant at the insult implied; whilst, on the other hand, many parsons and Nonconformist ministers rushed into print and said very unflattering things about the stage.

The matter certainly had considerable public importance, and deserved to be considered in cold blood; and one may well raise, and attempt to answer, the plain question whether the Church is right or wrong in adopting an attitude of hostility towards the stage. The question of gratitude has been put forward, but is not really relevant: no doubt players and managers in the past have been very liberal with their services for charitable purposes, including matters specifically connected with churches, and although very often the actual motive of the liberality has been the desire for advertisement and notoriety—and the desire is natural and blameless—yet it is fair to assume that in many instances the real motive has been truly charitable. It is, however, obvious that a person might steal with the object of giving the money to a church restoration fund, and clearly his intention would not excuse his act nor enable the Church to endorse it. The plain question is whether the stage "makes for righteousness."

Into the very thorny question raised some years ago by Clement Scott with disastrous consequences to himself as to whether the stage is demoralizing to the actors and actresses we do not now propose to venture. Much has been said and written on the topic, but it is largely one of fact, which demands the examination of a great deal of evidence. For the moment, then, let us merely discuss the question whether the effect of the stage on the audience is good or bad: in many cases there is no appreciable effect at all, and they may be eliminated.

Now, it must be admitted by all, save the extreme Puritans, that not only are there a great number of harmless pieces, but also many entirely moral in scope and aim, and likely to produce some good effect upon playgoers; but there are others. No doubt the famous *George Barnwell* has gone out of date, and the Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard plays, which did a great deal of harm, are not presented often in our days. Nevertheless there are so many pieces still produced which in one way or another are injurious to playgoers as to render it fairly arguable that the effect of the stage as a whole is bad.

So long as religion enjoins the virtue of chastity, its professors must look with hostility upon the very numerous pieces in which women, young and beautiful, are presented in dresses radically immodest. It seems impossible to deny that the sexual instincts of young men are often provoked to an extreme degree by the sight upon the stage of beautiful, half-nude young women; and it must be remembered that the spectacle is frequently accompanied by music of an erotic character. There is not the least doubt that the lighter musico-dramatic works and the pantomimes, in consequence of these matters, are the direct and immediate cause of many acts which religious people regard as acts of sexual immorality. The degree of nudity, of display of the human form in our theatres, and, of course, music-halls as well, to those unaccustomed to such matters is certainly quite startling, and by many people such displays are regarded as being entirely demoralizing to hot-blooded young men. It is, therefore, not surprising that there are religious people who have no objection to innocent amusements or to drama as drama, yet regard the theatre as causing a great deal of immorality in the way already indicated.

The Censor, not the present occupant of the post, at one time interfered and dealt with the question of costume at the Lyceum in the pre-Irving days, but his efforts were a failure, and, as far as is publicly known, have not been renewed since. Lately the degree of nudity considered permissible has been largely increased. The Salome dancers built a bridge of beads across what was regarded as a fixed gulf: it is difficult for stern moralists to stomach the *danse du ventre*.

The next aspect of the matter is that the tendency of the stage, broadly speaking, is to preach a kind of conventional morality somewhat below the standard considered admissible by serious people; one may go further, and say that plays have been produced, particularly French plays, such as the clever works of M. Capus, in which the accepted ideas of the sanctity of marriage are treated with contempt. Some works of this character have been translated and played at first-class theatres, and in popular dramas of the *Zaza* and *Sapho* type we were invited to grieve over the disappointments in lawless love of women quite shameless in character.

For years past a large proportion of plays have concerned themselves with the question of the seventh commandment; and whilst, as a rule, in order to dodge the Censor, it is pretended that no actual breach has occurred, the audience know that this is merely a pretence. In a large number of these plays the question of adultery is handled so facetiously as to tend to cause people to regard it as a trivial matter; whilst in numbers of the others, where the matter is handled more seriously, the actual consequences of sin are of such little inconvenience to the sinners that, although theoretically the plays preach a moral, the actual lesson is of no weight at all.

A curious aspect of the matter is that theatredom, as appears from the bulk of the evidence before the Censorship Commission, is opposed to the class of play in which the proposition is preached that "the wages of sin is death." Plays like *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*—as far as the episode of Nora's hopeless lover is concerned—and the works of that fierce moralist M. Brieux are banned by most of official theatredom, and some of them are censored. In fact, the whole note of the theatre is that gloomy or painful matters should be excluded. It is not too much to say that the theatre insists strongly upon being regarded simply as a place of entertainment, and objects almost savagely to dramas which really show sin as ugly and vice as harmful, both to the vicious and innocent; it refuses to be a moralizing institution, and those who seek to justify such an

attitude do so by claiming that it is a branch of art and not morals.

No doubt there are exceptions. We have had *Everyman* upon the stage, and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, in which the highest morality is preached, and in *The Fires of Fate* Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made a sincere effort to use the stage for noble purposes; nor would it be difficult to multiply instances. Moreover, it may be claimed that the dramas of Shakespeare, on the whole, have a high standard of morality which might satisfy the Church, and they play a considerable part on our modern stage; yet, speaking with a really substantial knowledge of the subject, one may say confidently that, despite much that is good and admirable, the balance is seriously to the bad. Our theatre does a little good and a great deal of harm.

It is possible that views such as these may be in the minds of those who wrote the circular of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, and if so they were justified in writing. If, on the other hand, they were merely actuated by the Puritanic idea that drama and the theatre are necessarily immoral, we strongly dissent, for the drama might be made a very powerful influence for good, and this renders the more regrettable the fact that, although in some respects there is a little advance towards the good, it is very slow, and it is doubtful whether the balance will be turned in our time. There is a greater advance in art than in morality as far as the theatre is concerned, but even in art the progress is very disappointing.

An Advantage of French Dramatists

There are many people who entertain the idea that modern French drama is better than modern English drama; and from this it seems a natural deduction that the French playwrights of to-day are abler than their contemporary English dramatists. A study of the large collection of French plays produced at the New Royalty Theatre by M. Gaston Mayer, as well as those presented under other managements during the last few years, and some knowledge of those which have not crossed the unamiable Channel, causes me to wonder. The careless may make the mistake of comparing the imported French pieces with the average English plays; this, of course, is absurd, since only the successful foreign works are played over here; consequently, for purposes of fair comparison, one must eliminate not only our failures but our plays of average merit. Even after the process of elimination has been made there lurks the danger of error, for when comparing the efforts of our playwrights with those of Paris one is making a comparison between men working under a heavy handicap and men unburdened by it. There is a whole world, or at least a whole half-world, open freely to the French writer into which the English dramatist is only permitted to crawl furtively. A large proportion of the foreign works in question, if faithfully translated and presented in London, would cause a howl of horror, based on the proposition that some of them are immoral and some are indelicate, and many both.

No sane people pretend to agree with the observation of some celebrated person, to the effect that anybody can be witty who is willing to be indecent; it is not more universally true than the proposition that no one can be witty unless he condescends to be indecent. Nevertheless there is something in it. Many real witticisms are indecent; some profoundly immoral plays are brilliant, and it is doubtful whether the authors of them would have been as successful if forbidden to be indecent or immoral.

Let us contrast fairly the positions of the French and the English dramatist. The former has at his disposal all the material for drama available to the latter, except perhaps a limited particular branch of local humour, whilst the Englishman not only would be unwise to employ the foreign local humour, but is forbidden to use a very large number of subjects and ideas open to his competitor. In other words, the Englishman's stock may be regarded as x , and the Frenchman's as $x + y$, for the local humour on one side may be set off against the local humour on the other.

Now y , far from being unimportant, is the chief material employed by many of the Parisian playwrights. They and their audiences have grown tired of x , whilst our unhappy writers are almost bound to confine themselves to this far from unknown quantity. Thackeray is said to have regretted that he did not enjoy the freedom of a Fielding. Which of our playwrights does not envy the licence of a Capus? Think of our poor British dramatist compelled to write for a public that likes anecdotal plays, demands happy-ever-after endings and is easily shocked. Really his position is pitiful. The peculiar laws of the theatre require such brutal directness of method that although our novelists are able, by means of delicate treatment, to handle almost any subject, the playwright is condemned to something like a gin-horse revolution, round a little track of conventional morality.

It is a rather curious fact that two different schools of French dramatists approach the forbidden half-world from opposite poles—but they get there. Emile Augier and Dumas *filis* were sincere moralists according to their points of view, though the methods of their moralizing some times seem quaint to us. Both of them preached the importance of chastity and the beauty of conjugal love and parental and filial affection, and each admired fervently the idea of family—an idea deemed comparatively unimportant in our colonizing country.

On the whole their ideals are ours, though sometimes there seems to us a queer twist in their expression of them. In order to support their ideas of social and family life and their view of the sanctity of true marriage they were forced to exhibit the perils caused by lawless passion, and frequently their works, as in such extreme instances as *Le Mariage d'Olympe* and *La Femme de Claude*, which has the memorable preface with the *Tue la* phrase, deal candidly with very ugly matters.

Their successors, putting aside such men as Brieux and Hervieu—whose intentions are strictly honourable—may pretend to be moralists, but they adopt an impudently unconventional attitude. They seem to modify the phrase that "property is theft" into the proposition that "marriage is a selfish monopoly." We have had play after play apparently based upon a merely sensual idea of free love. Like their predecessors they handle mud, and they handle it as Walton bade the angler handle the frog when using it as bait. Some of them seem

to have no prejudice in favour of people who try to exercise decent self-restraint. Without pleading their cause, one must point out that in the domain of lawless passion there are hundreds of thrilling or vastly comic situations at the command of the dramatist, whether he be moralist or simply boulevardier. No wonder then that there seem to be far more original plays in France than in England.

The advantage of the foreigners is even greater in the matter of dialogue than subject. With the aid of tact and certain elaborate conventions the English dramatist is able to handle many of his competitor's themes and has contrived to adapt some of his forward, if hardly advanced, plays and by ridiculous changes decidedly emasculating them, has succeeded in presenting a sort of version of a number of the saucy farces. The dialogue baffles him.

It cannot be denied that a great deal of the dialogue of French plays is very funny, rather shocking, and not exactly gross. As a rule the more distinguished writers avoid the tone of the *joyusetés* of an Armand Sylvestre, a writer capable of using bluntly without acknowledgement the crudest of Chaucer's tales and also of writing beautiful poetry quite free from offence; but even when the humbler *gauloiseries* are neglected the finer indelicacy is employed, and the men laugh and ladies pretend to put up their fans. Nobody, perhaps, is at all worse, for the *jeune fille* is only taken to carefully selected plays, except at the seaside, where in the casino she attends performances of works that in Paris she would not be allowed to see; and, moreover, there is truth in what a French manager once shrewdly observed—"Those who can't understand the jokes won't be hurt, and those who can, can't."

CHAPTER VIII

CASUAL NOTES ON ACTING

Mr H.B. Irving on his Art

To the reviewer of books fell the task of criticizing Mr H.B. Irving's book, "Occasional Papers," as literature. The dramatic critic has the right of considering the views expressed in it concerning the stage. There are two essays of importance, from reading which one may learn the ideas, admirably expressed, of Mr Irving concerning his art—"The English Stage in the Eighteenth Century" and "The Art and Status of the Actor." The study of them, which they deserve, leads to certain conclusions hardly, it may be, anticipated by the author.

In his defence of the actor's art against its detractors Mr Irving seems to ignore a fact which may be expressed in a phrase taken from the greatest of actor-dramatist-managers, and modified. There is acting and acting: the distinction is not merely in quality but also in kind. It would be difficult to define acting so as not to include the efforts of the music-hall artist, and even of the circus clown; any definition excluding them would be arbitrary, and also historically inaccurate. If, then, acting is to embrace these as well as the admirable performance of Mr Irving in *Hamlet*, disputes concerning the status of the actor as an artist must often arise.

In fact, until one reaches the actor's performance in dramas sincerely intended to be works of art, it is difficult to treat his art seriously. A step farther: one cannot accept as a work of dramatic art a piece that does not seek to cause an illusion, or any play which formally admits the existence of the audience. A workable distinction may be found in using the terms "drama" and "entertainment," "actor" and "entertainer."

Mr Irving's essays lead to another distinction—artificial, no doubt. He speaks of the sixteenth century as "the century of great drama," of the seventeenth as "a century in which the interest shifts from the drama to its exponents, the players." The nineteenth, according to him, is "noteworthy for the extraordinary advance made in the presentation of plays on the stage." In other words, the seventeenth is great drama, the eighteenth great acting, and the nineteenth great stage-mounting.

The seventeenth, says Mr Irving, "is in theatrical history the century of the actor; he and not the dramatist is the dominating figure, his the achievement that survives, his that finds in this century its highest opportunity for distinction.... For the plays that attracted audiences in the eighteenth century are for the most part dead things." Later on: "There was another and a very strong reason why the actor of the eighteenth century was encouraged—nay, driven—to exert his powers to the utmost. It lay in the conditions under which he was compelled to exercise his art."

These conditions were unsuitability of costume, the conduct of an unruly audience, and the meanness of the mounting. The eighteenth-century players pursued "the pure art of acting, unassisted by the collaboration of other arts," and in them their art received its highest expression.

From this it appears that if you wish for great acting you must have poor plays cheaply mounted. Probably Mr Irving would shun such a conclusion. He would say that the great acting was the result of the conditions, but not an inevitable result, and that whilst modesty of mounting may be a necessary condition, worthlessness of drama is not. Yet we see a distinction and a truth emerging. The actors of the golden age—of acting—had to make silk purses out of sows' ears, and they made them. Their age was less golden when they had great drama to play.

The triumph of a play, so far as the co-operation of author and actor is concerned, may be regarded as one

hundred, and the greater the share in it of the one the less that of the other. Since the actor's proportion is higher as the dramatist's is lower, it follows that his work is more brilliant in mediocre plays than in masterpieces. This, however, cannot be accepted without taking into account the fact that many plays have been written very skilfully as mere vehicles for the actor.

It is sometimes a nice question which is the horse and which the cart. How often in the heyday of her fame did we see Bernhardt in any save "built-up" dramas—plays "written round" her and intended to give her an opportunity of showing off her amazing physical gifts? Need it be added that the "star" actresses of other nations were all eager to appear in these pieces? Is, then, the actor's art at its greatest when the player is thrilling the house in a mediocre drama, or when he and the true dramatist are producing a great effect together?

Mr Irving will probably reply that the actors of the golden age had great triumphs in Shakespeare. Now, it may be observed that in most of his tragedies, though not guilty of writing "star" parts, Shakespeare, himself an actor, took very great pains to create "fat" acting parts, and the actor-managers of the eighteenth century were careful that, in the mutilated versions which they presented, these parts did not shrink in relative importance. The great dramatist's action in this respect is not, as a general rule, followed by the serious playwrights of the present.

Whilst speaking of Shakespeare, one may refer to a passage in the essays which has some bearing on the question of the place of acting in the hierarchy of the arts. Garrick clearly was the greatest actor of his century; but in speaking of Barry, Mr Irving says: "He had not Garrick's fire or versatility; he had no gift for comedy; but in such parts as Othello, Romeo and Alexander the Great his superior physique, his stately grace, his charming pathos gave him the victory." *His superior physique* is a phrase which explains the reluctance of some fully to admit the actor's claim for his art: they think that the purely physical enters too often into the matter. There may even be detractors moved by jealousy, unknown, perhaps, to themselves, of the "superior physique."

Possibly there are more subtle reasons why many writers are unwilling to recognize the highest claims of the actor. They are perhaps, discernible in what Mr Irving calls "the sympathetic reflections of Charles Lamb" and the "impressive nonsense that Doctor Johnson talked" about acting. In one of the essays we find: "There has been at all times a certain resentment on the part of some writers against the player, against his immediate fame.... It is a form of jealousy that has warped many otherwise enlightened minds: an envy that forgets that a capacity to act is a much rarer gift than a capacity to write." What is the meaning of the last sentence. Does it mean that Garricks are rarer than Tupperts?—a sad thought: or that Siddonses are rarer than Shakespeares?—which may be denied confidently.

Does it mean anything? Perhaps not. It merely exhibits a confusion between the relative and the absolute. This warping jealousy—if it exist—really is due to a feeling that the actor becomes great in popularity at the expense of the author. When the actor causes the triumph of the play the author should be grateful; when the play causes the triumph of the actor the playwright may feel a little jealous, and writers may sympathize with him. There are plays and plays, just as there is acting and acting. In subtle modern pieces conscientious actors of fair ability rarely fail, and success (within certain limits) is common in *Hamlet*.

Mr Bouchier and "Max" on English Acting

Mr Bouchier has written rather bitterly about some remarks of Mr Max Beerbohm concerning English acting. Apparently "Max" has asserted that "the average level of acting is admittedly lower in England than in France, Germany or Italy." Hence Mr Bouchier's wrath, which obviously is unselfish, since remarks about the average level of acting have nothing to do with him, for no country is rich enough in histrionic talent to deny that Mr Bouchier is far above the average.

Is Mr Max Beerbohm's assertion well founded? The "admittedly" inspires distrust. Experience teaches the middle-aged that as a rule people allege that a proposition is admitted when they have no evidence to offer of its truth, and are aware that it will be disputed. Does anyone exist who knows really what is the average level of acting in the four countries named? Such knowledge could only be based upon a first-hand study of acting in all kinds of theatres in many towns of England, France, Germany and Italy. A music-hall agent is the only kind of person likely to have made such a study. Has Mr Max made it?

Probably the clever caricaturist and lively critic is really talking about the so-called West End theatres and the foreigners who come to us, and of occasional visits paid by him to selected pieces in important Continental cities. If so, his observations are based upon quite insufficient materials. Critics are wont to praise foreign acting unfairly at the expense of our own performers, and they receive the support of opinions expressed by some foreigners, notably French and Italians.

Members of gesticulative races are apt to think English players very wooden, because when representing British people our actors and actresses are much restrained in movement. A French or Italian critic can hardly appreciate some of the splendid "Stage Society" or Court Theatre performances, such, for instance, as that of *The Voysey Inheritance*, which could not have been surpassed in any theatre or country.

The offensive comparisons often, even generally, are based upon performances where our players are at a serious disadvantage. On what may be called neutral ground, such as Ibsen plays, we have held our own very well against any performances in London by Continental players; Miss Janet Achurch was a more characteristic Nora than Duse or Réjane; nor have we seen a Mrs Linden, Hedda Gabler or Hilda Wangle comparable with that of Miss Elizabeth Robins. There is no need to multiply instances.

English players do not represent certain foreign characters as well as do the foreigners. Is this surprising? They are handicapped, obviously. How often have we seen a French, German or Italian performance of an

English play concerning English people? Was the great Eleonora as painfully truthful as Mrs Patrick Campbell in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*? No one can deny that her companions were almost ludicrous to us. Can one imagine any foreign company able to present *His House in Order* without entirely destroying the stage illusion and losing the colour? There was a very fine performance at the St James's, with intense soberness of manner in important matters as a keynote.

It is largely a question of geography; the Englishman expresses rapture by the phrase "not half-bad" where the foreigner piles superlative on superlative of gush. It is our quality and our defect that we have a strange shyness, which prevents the exhibition of emotion for fear of ridicule. On our stage, as in our real life, the beloved son comes home from a long voyage, and, meeting his father, shakes hands a little warmly and says, "Hallo, governor!" or something poetic like that; whilst abroad the two men kiss one another and utter highly emotional phrases of rapture. Everyone knows that the feelings are equally deep in the two cases, but our cross-Channel critics doubt the depth of the English feeling, whilst our native players cannot do the kissing and hugging with an air of sincerity.

Now, when taking these facts into account we should be very careful in appraising the efforts of our own players. Not only ought we to avoid comparing select teams of foreign players with our own scratch companies, but also it is our duty to consider whether the strangers are appearing in plays better or worse than the average of our own, and we must take into account the fact that they are gaining from the advantage of novelty. Lastly, there remains the question how far they would appear to be better than ours if appearing on neutral ground.

It would be idle to assert that the average level of our acting is as good as it ought to be. Many theatres suffer severely from the lack of satisfactory stage-management; some from the determination of an actor-manager to be the central figure of every scene. Bitter complaints are uttered by young players about not receiving sufficient suggestions at rehearsal and finding that the stage-manager has so little authority that not only the leading players act as they chose, but even the smaller stars refuse successfully to obey him.

There is another point in Mr Bouchier's letter. He suggests that Mr Max Beerbohm is not competent to criticize actors because he is not a master of any branch of the difficult art of acting. This is a very foolish old fallacy. People who do work essentially ephemeral, such as acting, do it for those who are to witness it; and their merit is in direct proportion to their impression upon the audience, and they can have no effect upon anybody else. Actors, with trifling exceptions, do not form part of the audience. Critics do, and the actor seeks to affect the audience and the critics, and not the brother "pro." occasionally found in the auditorium.

The merit of his work lies entirely in affecting an audience *in the way intended by the author*. The technical devices adopted have nothing to do with the question. No doubt there is much technical knowledge involved in acting, but it must be remembered that it is all a means to an end. The cult of technique for itself is perilous to an art.

After all, the matter may be reduced to an absurdity. Would Mr Bouchier refuse to say that a man is well dressed, or a dinner ill cooked because he is (presumably) ignorant of the mysteries of the arts of tailoring and cooking? Moreover, some of us, perhaps even Mr Beerbohm, know a good deal about the technique of acting, even if we could not "make-up" Mr Bouchier to look like a costermonger. The actor must be very vain in his conceit who has not had valuable hints concerning his acting from the critics, unless he be one of those who, unlike Mr Bouchier, never read notices—yet often complain of an unfavourable one. The article called "Signor Borza on the English Theatre," which appears on page 252, should be considered in relation to these remarks.

The Sicilian Players

During many years our stage has seen nothing like the success of the Sicilians. They presented themselves at the Shaftesbury Theatre with little in the shape of preliminary paragraphs to "boom" them. Most of their repertoire consisted of works unknown to London playgoers. Several of their plays were performed in a puzzling dialect. Even the judicious step of offering a fairly full synopsis of the plays was neglected. Notwithstanding all this, the theatre was well patronized during two seasons and the audiences have exhibited enthusiasm.

What is the meaning of all this; why should these village folk, playing what in the main seem to be simple peasant melodramas, have troubled the senses of Londoners? The obvious answer is that the affair is a triumph of pure acting. One pauses to inquire whether this is true. In the case of most of their plays the judgment of the audience concerning the acting must be very rough and ready—so far, at least, as the performance is fulfilling its true purpose of presenting in action the ideas of the author.

How are we to know, when watching a play in Sicilian dialect and provided with a printed "argument" comprised in about a couple of hundred words, whether the players are doing anything like their duty to the author? By-the-by the poor Censor had to admit that he passed their plays on the strength of these inadequate synopses! Yet there was absolute conviction in most of us that their work was sincere and at times quite tremendous as a matter of pure acting. The word "tremendous" must be confined to the efforts of Signora Mimi Aguglia Ferrau and Signor Grasso. The others form a very good company, but it is only in respect of these two that one employs the word "genius," which cautious writers use very rarely, though there are journalists who lavish it upon everybody a thumb-nail's thickness above mediocrity.

Concerning the lady there is no doubt at all. She is a little woman, with a rather strongly featured, intelligent face, brilliant teeth and big eyes who has, to begin with, the rare gift of filling the stage. There is a perceptible difference whenever she is present. She may be one of a crowd of twenty, and saying and doing nothing, but her presence is felt. At her command is a delightful roguish comedy and a horrible realistic tragedy. In *Malia* she is a Phèdre burnt up with unslakable passion, a rustic Phèdre, no doubt, but Bernhardt

never gave more strongly the idea of "*Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée.*"

There are tricks in her work; she is fond of standing her profile parallel with the footlights, and of exhibiting the whites of her large eyes; she is conscious of the extraordinary eloquence of her shoulders and back, and likes to exhibit distress by the play of them. There is often excess in violent contrast of light and shade.

Yet no one can display subsiding emotion more finely than she does. Most of our players turn off emotion as one turns off the gas. In the Sicilian one notices a kind of aftermath; her fury may be succeeded by rapture; her grief by joy; but for a while underneath the rapture or joy one detects signs of the fact that physically she is recovering gradually from the effects of fury or grief. The voice is a little harsh, the gestures are not exactly elegant, she is always somewhat *peuple*, and always magnificent.

In some respects, Signor Grasso is quite different; his appearance is unpleasant, he is an ugly man, often with a fatuous air, but his grace of movement is quite extraordinary; occasionally he gives snatches of dance so exquisitely rhythmical that one longs for more. His pantomime is larger in movement than hers; his passion less terrible. He too has tricks; he is over-fond of playing with the chairs; in *Malia* one might say that he plays skittles with them.

There is rather an excess of gesture, of a naturalistic explanatory gesture, apparently borrowed from pantomime; one feels that some of it is deliberately used to aid the ignorant foreigner to understand; he does things which make the Briton squirm; has a habit of kissing the ugly, male members of his troupe with big, resounding smacks on both cheeks, and in a loving fashion pats them like a Graeco-Roman wrestler; but there is always the extraordinarily graceful, lithe movement and, with curious exceptions, a supreme unconsciousness of the audience; whilst the passionate volubility and the almost brutal ferocity thrill the house.

They are a queer lot, these village players; supremely unself-conscious when actually acting, yet guilty of taking "calls" in the middle of a scene. If pressed, they probably would give an encore, and with a little urging Signora Mimi would yield to a cry of "bis" and give a repetition of her abominable, appalling, vastly clever fit in *Malia*, to please the friendly Britons.

At the end of a scene the players come forward, hand in hand, bobbing and bowing, grinning and smiling, in a way that suggests a troupe of acrobats after a successful turn. It is not difficult to overrate their work as a company, or rather—and this in a sense is the same thing—to underrate that of our own players by comparison.

There is one very noteworthy fact: from the point of view of a London manager the scenery and appointments were contemptible, and this apparently did not matter a rap. An audience, five-sixths of it British, was enthralled by these players, although the scenery and the furniture of the indoor sets had no pretension to magnificence, were sometimes almost absurdly squalid.

The venture at the Shaftesbury showed that if you give what the public deems good acting you need not bother about painted canvas and furniture; and what applies to good acting applies to good plays. The Sicilians taught us this, even if, perhaps, little else; for our players, unless they are to represent Sicilians, or such volcanic creatures, can learn comparatively little from them. Indeed, our delightful visitors could be taught something by our despised stage in the way of reticence, for there is little doubt that they love a horror for horror's sake and revel in the gory joys of the penny gaff. This may be said with full recognition of the fact that, according to their own standard, they are intensely sincere and superbly equipped in consequence of hard work and natural gifts.

Alleged Dearth of Great Actresses

Lately there have appeared some remarks by an unnamed "prominent dramatic author" alleging that "there is a dearth of great actresses just now," and stating that "several serious plays which it was hoped might be produced next autumn are in danger of being indefinitely postponed because of the inability of finding actresses capable of playing strongly emotional parts in drama of deep and complex interest." These dramas of "deep and complex interest" are quite as rare in our theatre as great actresses and we only believe in their existence when we see them.

Of course there is a dearth of great actresses—there always was and always will be: "great" is only a relatively term. Thank goodness for this, seeing that they are sadly injurious to drama. On the other hand, to allege a lack of actresses competent to play strong emotional parts seems quite unjust.

The remarks of the "prominent dramatic author" were followed by a letter to the same effect by Mr George Rollit, known to fame as the author of a fairly good farce produced in 1904 at the Royalty. He appears to have allowed it to get known that a new play of his was to be produced in the West End, but he was unable to find "an adequate exponent for the leading role"—what a pretty phrase!—"which requires an emotional young actress, capable of portraying strong light and shade." He received many offers from actresses, none of whom were suitable.

These two complainants are making a mistake concerning the task of the dramatist, who fails in his labours if his plays cannot adequately be acted without the assistance of great actresses. They are foolishly pandering to the vanity of the players, who as a rule have a tendency to exaggerate their importance in relation to drama. The error is very common, and the idea that plays should be written primarily to exhibit the players and not the ideas of the author is the bane of our theatre.

Until our dramatists act firmly on the view that their duty is to write plays interesting when rendered by a good, starless company, they will only produce as a rule *bravura* pieces of little artistic value. By all means let

them write strongly emotional parts, if they can; but they are not worthy of their royalties if their characters do not generally lie within the range of a fair number of actresses. There is a grotesque mixture of vanity and modesty in the mind of an author who thinks his work worthy of performance by an actress of genius and at the same time believes it to be too weak to succeed without her help.

It will be answered, probably, that Shakespeare's plays demand players of genius and yet certainly are not mere *bravura* pieces. There is truth and untruth in this—truth that our public will not patronize Shakespeare when acted by average performers; untruth in the proposition that they cannot adequately be represented by players without genius. We have unfortunately got into the very bad habit of going to see his works not for their intrinsic interest but for the sake of the acting and mounting. It is not *Hamlet* but Mr Smith as the Prince of Denmark; not *Romeo and Juliet* but Miss Brown and Mr Jones as the lovers of Verona, and so on, which form the attraction; and the works are cut and played out of balance in order to meet the demand.

The author would have resented a suggestion that his characters are so superhuman as to need marvellous performance: these remarks are without prejudice to the question whether even with the aid of great players Shakespeare's dramas reveal a fair proportion of their merits on the stage.

The outcry concerning the alleged dearth of good actresses is very commonly uttered and exceedingly ill-founded. It is wise to avoid the thorny question how far the recognized leading ladies of our first-class theatres are satisfactory—yet it may be said that a successful playwright recently complained that as a body they were not, and that, despite his protests, he was compelled to have his works performed by the ladies in possession—and judicious to shirk the proposition, sometimes put forward, that some of these do not hold their positions by mere force of merit. Putting, then, aside the actresses enjoying grandeur in London, and leaving out of account a still more remarkable group which includes Mrs Kendal, Mrs Patrick Campbell and Miss Olga Nethersole—whom we too rarely see in town—and even ignoring what may be called "recognized leading ladies" who are "resting" reluctantly, there remains a powerful group of young actresses of experience and talent fully competent to satisfy the reasonable requirements of these gentlemen who are complaining of the "dearth." Since this was written a number of young ladies then on the boards but not accepted as leading ladies have made their way to the front.

Character Actresses

Several letters have been written lately, pathetic letters, from actresses unable to get engagements. All of the writers have enjoyed successes, have been referred to by important papers as "promising" or "coming leading ladies," each has had at least one engagement at a very handsome weekly salary, yet every one of them is in doleful dumps.

Here is a passage from one: "In 1904 I did so well that I lived in luxury, and, I fear, somewhat extravagantly, and my performance as heroine in — was so highly praised that I had no doubt my future was well assured. Last year I earned £40, and I have to live on what I earn, and if I look dowdy when I go seeking an engagement I have little chance of getting it. Yet I am under thirty, and although not one of the little group of alleged beauties whose faces appear monotonously week after week in the illustrated papers, I am well-enough-looking when made up, and have read in criticisms references to my 'charm of presence' and even to my 'beauty.' What is to become of me, I don't know. Of course I am particularly hopeless seeing that nine of the London theatres out of less than three times that number are now devoted to musical comedy and I am unable to sing, nor should I be enthusiastic about taking work sadly in contrast with my once high and hopeful ambition."

The last phrase deserves some consideration. To a great extent the reason why the stage causes so much unhappiness among actresses is that a large proportion enter the profession not in a simple straightforward way in the choice of a career, but because they dream of great triumphs. Probably the career of Ellen Terry, and the exhibition of public affection shown upon the occasion of her jubilee, brought many recruits to the stage.

Putting aside the fact that Ellen Terry is unique, one may remark that very few actresses can hope to get close to the top of the tree, for obvious reasons. In the case of most careers and professions, nine men out of ten who join them know perfectly well that they will never do more than earn a decent living, and they shape their lives accordingly; but nearly every young actress expects to become a leading lady at a West End theatre, though there are few West End theatres devoted to real drama, and in some out of the small number there will always be a manager's wife or friend as an obstacle.

The misfortune is that few young actresses—if any—say to themselves deliberately that they will aim at character parts, or old-woman parts. Nearly all the old-woman and *grande-dame* characters are played by actresses who have been leading ladies and during some period have had the painful experience of failing, on account of their age, to get the engagements they have sought. The Juliet of one season is not the Nurse or the Lady Capulet of the next; a considerable time passes before there is such a shift of characters, and she acts nothing at all during the interregnum, which is spent in vain attempts to get the Juliet parts, met with cruel rebuffs on the score of age.

Now, some of the old-man actors on the stage are quite young; they have chosen a particular line, conscious of the fact that nature has denied them the privilege of playing parts that will cause the stage-door-keeper to be deluged with amorous letters addressed to them, and aware, too, that the triumphs of the broad comedian will never be theirs. These young old-men are often quite as successful in old-man parts as those who have served most of a lifetime upon the stage.

It is not more difficult for a young woman to play the old-woman character or the *grande-dame* part than for the young man to tackle the Sir Peter Teazle or the ordinary modern old-man; nor is this the only class of work other than that of lovely heroine which lies open to the actress. When one hears discussion concerning

the casting of plays there is often talk about the difficulty of finding an actress for a Fanny Brough part, which, of course, is quite distinct from what may be considered specifically a *soubrette* character. Complaints are uttered about the difficulty of finding a player to represent the comic mother-in-law; indeed, playwrights are sometimes affected in their work by the fear that if they write broad comedy for feminine parts the difficulty of casting them will be insurmountable.

Handsome salaries are paid to the few ladies who have a well-deserved reputation as actresses in the class of character thus indicated, and there is a demand for them—a demand generally supplied by superannuated leading ladies and aged *soubrettes*. It may be offensive to a girl's vanity deliberately to choose a path in which her personal charms, or those which she believes herself to possess, must be of little service. On the English stage it may be doubted if such a policy will ever be adopted, though on French there are instances which might be cited of actresses who have played dowager characters during the whole of a profitable, long and respected career.

No doubt there is another side of the matter. Many, most actresses, join the stage with other ideas than of merely gaining a reasonably comfortable living wage. Pure ambition in some cases, vanity in others, are the motive-force, to say nothing of the numbers who may be regarded simply as stagestruck; and to such as these nothing seems worth striving for save to represent the triumphant heroine, the fascinating *soubrette*, or Lady Macbeth.

Upon all, these prudent counsels will be wasted—indeed, those who know a little of what passes behind the scenes are well aware that young actresses, almost starving, refuse to accept character parts that would help them out of poverty because they are afraid of jeopardising their chance—their one-to-a-hundred chance—of obtaining the perilous position of leading lady.

There is, of course, another class. Some, perhaps many, become actresses simply from a pure love of what they deem a beautiful, noble art, and for them it is only natural to think that nothing is worth representing save the greater characters; it is difficult to gratify such a love by representing a middle-aged comic spinster, or one of the elderly duchesses, without whom a modern comedy is deemed ungentee. Let us hope that Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Academy, which already is bearing fruit, will affect this deplorable phenomenon. Those responsible may succeed in convincing a fair number of their charming pupils that it is wise not to aim at glittering triumphs which fall to few, but to qualify for work necessary in most plays, and very often done indifferently.

Stage Misfits

"One of those things no fellah can understand," to quote a phrase of Lord Dundreary, is the way in which players get chosen for their parts. Most cases, no doubt, are not instances of square pegs in round holes; but the number of exceptions is enormous, a fact which has lately been made manifest by one of the short French seasons. An actress of really great talent has appeared as a star in her husband's company, and the obvious judgment upon her first two appearances was that the characters chosen were quite unsuitable to her. The reference is to Madame Suzanne Desprès.

In *La Rafale* and *Le Détour* she had to represent a Parisian, a *chic Parisienne*, a creature of nerves, elegance and, according to Balzac, sound business calculation, Madame Desprès suggested none of these qualities; in physique she seems an agreeable-looking, strong-minded countrywoman with brains; obviously she has no instinct for dress; and, despite remarkable skill and a fine exhibition of acting, she presented a woman quite different from the author's character, one also who would never have behaved like M. Bernstein's heroines.

The play suffered and the player suffered, and probably only the critical could see what an admirable actress she is and guess how perfectly she would represent a higher type of woman. This is no isolated case. We often see the race-horse used in pulling heavy weights and the Suffolk punch employed for speed, and each blamed for the unsatisfactory accomplishment of the absurd task. Many of the disasters in the theatre are due to this.

As a rule the actor-manager or manageress demands the principal character, however unsuitable. Going back a little, one recalls with astonishment the experiment of Irving in representing Romeo, and many have wondered why Ellen Terry in 1888 appeared as Lady Macbeth. Some of the pleasantest memories of the playgoer concern superb performances by Miss Elizabeth Robins, and yet they can recollect two or three appearances in commonplace dramas that were flat failures. Mrs Patrick Campbell has had several checks which would be astounding if one did not recollect that she was constitutionally unsuited for the task she attempted.

The most ardent Bensonian will hardly suggest that his idols are always judicious in their choice of characters. To use the stock stage term, players often "see themselves" in characters in which the public sees only them and not the characters. Are there no kind friends on the stage to give unpalatable advice?

One reason for the extraordinary success of the performances by the Stage Society and the Vedrenne-Barker management and of Pinero plays was the judicious choice of players whose physique and temperament coincided with their parts. Several times we had what seemed brilliant pieces of acting by performers who never did anything before or afterwards worthy of admiration. At almost every fresh production enthusiastic young critics discovered a new actor or actress who, after all, was only an old friend well fitted at last.

The lack of attention by managers to this matter of suitability often leads to very awkward results, chiefly in the case of the ladies. Many times we have listened to ravings about the beauty of the heroine, and when she has appeared there has been a giggle in the house on account of her lack of beauty. We have frequently heard

references to the tiny feet of a healthy young woman who would hardly have got three of her toes into the glass slipper, or to the dainty hands of a lady who would split a pair of eights.

The beauty of the men is not so frequently referred to, but we sometimes have an ugly fellow vainly trying to live up to suggestions that he is an Adonis and merely looking ridiculous in consequence. The matter of age, too, enters into the question—at times disastrously. Some actresses are like Cleopatra or Ninon de l'Enclos, but many look twice their reputed age. It is only in the case of Juliet that it is deemed decent to refer to this difficulty, and then merely because Shakespeare has set her so cruelly young that everybody knows nobody can play and look the part.

In this matter a little good sense would work wonders. We critics are much to blame, and blamed, for not trying to force the entry of good sense. Some of our forebrothers never hesitated to talk bluntly about the physical unsuitability of players for their parts, but we have grown so mealy-mouthed that if Miss Florence Haydon were to play Rosalind or Mr Louis Calvert Romeo, we should merely use some obscure phrases about unsuitability of temperament instead of saying something usefully brutal about the folly of these admirable artists. If we go a little further, our editors are pestered with letters to which we have the privilege of replying.

The whole thing is absurd. The public is not deluded, and we hear murmurs in the theatre and outcries in the streets about the fact that Miss So-and-so is far too ugly for her part and Mr So-and-so too old, and the plays fail because the charges are true and the stage illusion has never been created, and the critic's authority—if any—is weakened. There are as many bad performances because the players are physically unsuitable as because they are otherwise incompetent.

If these ideas were acted upon the profession at large would gain, for the players would be put more constantly in circulation; on the other hand it will be suggested that the actors and actresses would grow less skilful, since it may be imagined that their highest achievements are exhibited when overcoming the greatest difficulties, in which proposition there is an obvious fallacy; and also that they would gain less experience, having a smaller variety in parts.

The advocates of the old stock system certainly would howl, because they think it did an actor good to play a great number of vastly different characters. It must, however, be recollected that in the time when the stock system flourished, putting aside the comparatively small classic repertoire, a very large proportion of the pieces were written upon more mechanical lines than the better plays of the present time, and parts tended to become classifiable into distinct well-known categories. To-day popular players are often engaged for long terms at theatres, where they are inevitably given characters for many of which they are unsuited in physique or temperament, to say nothing of age.

Another matter is the question of accent. From time to time we have players on our boards who speak English with a foreign accent in parts where such an accent is an absurdity. No doubt some have grappled with this difficulty very cleverly. Modjeska, for instance, Bandmann, Mlle. Béatrice, Marius, Juliette Nesville and the lady who played here as Madame Simon le Bargy.

The memory of few goes back to Fechter, and it would hardly be tactful to refer on this topic to several American players. The effect, however, necessarily is unfortunate; it is difficult enough on the stage to create illusions, and very important not to multiply difficulties. Opera, with the magic aid of music, may contend successfully against such monstrosities as one singer singing an Italian part in French, whilst the others offer various styles of Italian, Anglo-Italian, German-Italian, Swedish-Italian—almost any Italian save the *lingua Toscana*. Spoken drama is not so robust in this particular, and the matter in question does not happen often enough to acquire validity by becoming a convention.

Stars

The past season has been comparatively disastrous to the theatres, and many pieces have failed; this state of things is coincident with healthy progress in English drama, and the year has seen several productions that would have startled as well as delighted enthusiasts a few years ago. Putting aside musical comedy and comic opera, one asks why it is that a great deal of money has been lost at the playhouses and a very large proportion of pieces have been failures.

There are outcries about a dearth of good plays and competent players, and the supposed deficiency in these elements is generally offered as an explanation. Is it the true one? Certainly not. The development of the star system is the chief cause of the disaster. In former days we used to blame the actor-manager, but since the time when all were throwing stones at him a good deal has happened for which the ordinary actor-manager is not responsible—directly.

To-day several of the managers who are not actors run their theatres on the star system, and we find the announcement frequently made that Mr X. will present Miss So-and-so, or Mr So-and-so, or Mrs So-and-so, in a new play by Mr XXX. In other words, the manager is really offering his star to the public, and not the play. Moreover, a number of players are run as stars by syndicates. In plain English, most of our theatres are managed, or rather mismanaged, upon the supposition that the principal players are more important than what they represent.

It is the opinion of many disinterested observers that only three or four of our actors and actress in legitimate drama draw an appreciable amount of money in London to the theatre, and sacrifices made for those who do not obviously are futile. The unfortunate result of the system is that the playwright is sacrificed to the stars—most of whom are ineffectual. He is required to fit his drama to the personality of one, or it may be two, in the cast.

Let us tell briefly the story of one failure of the year. A play of some merit was shown to a popular actor, who suggested that if certain changes were made in it he would recommend it to his syndicate. The changes were suggested comprehensively under the phrase "If you can strengthen my part."

The part was strengthened—that is to say, other parts were weakened, speeches were taken from them and given to the hero, scenes for minor characters were excised or shortened, and the star was dragged into the finale of the second act at great sacrifice of plausibility. The play was then recommended.

It happened that the star had just separated from the leading lady who generally appeared with him, so the syndicate was free in choice of a heroine. Three names were suggested. It was admitted that two of the actresses were more suitable than the third, who, however, had a "backer" willing to put money into the venture. The money prevailed and the lady was chosen. She promptly insisted upon having her part strengthened, so the play was remutilated till her wishes were complied with. Is it surprising that when it was produced the critics fell foul of it and denounced the faults due to these transactions, or amazing that it did not run long?

This is by no means an isolated case: there has been one comedy given this year, the last act of which was blamed by everybody. Why? Because the star, who was not the chief figure in it as the play was written, insisted upon his prerogatives, therefore the part of the second actor in the cast was cut down to next to nothing and a big irrelevant scene was introduced for the star, in which he uttered some of the speeches taken from the second actor's part. To think of a work of art being submitted to such treatment! It is difficult to emphasize it by a parallel. One might ask what would be the result if a painter were to attempt to convert a purely imaginative picture into a portrait, and, in addition to altering the face and the lines of the figures, were to put in a number of accessories to please the patron's taste, and also to accept suggestions from the sitter as to changes in the colour-scheme.

Now, it may be asserted confidently that a number of the plays produced this year have undergone the process of being altered to please managers, actor-managers, star players and syndicates. In addition a good many have been written from the start with a view of fitting the stars without alteration, and such works, in most cases, are quite out of balance and proportion, and, moreover, put a burden upon the stars that they are quite unable to bear, or we to endure.

It was bad enough when there were only two or three stars, but now the managers have starred a whole shoal of mediocre players and sacrificed plays and dramatist to them. That there seems to be a dearth of good plays is in part because of the fact that some good ones are ruined by changes made in them, whilst others are refused because they do not contain star parts, and the authors cannot or will not convert them into star plays.

The stars, created by the managers and industriously boomed by their press agents, by the newspapers and by the postcard merchants, have become Frankensteins to their creators. They demand and get extravagant salaries. Yet experience shows that few really draw people to the theatre.

When the manager makes his calculation he can only put a limited sum to the salary list, and since he starts with one or two star salaries there is an insufficient amount left for the rest of the company—that is to say, instead of having the other characters represented by players who would be chosen for them if money were no object, they have to be taken by the cheapest performers who can possibly be deemed competent.

The position of the unstarred actor is peculiarly precarious, for he is often passed over, although the salary expected by him is not very large, in favour of somebody cheaper and less competent. Some casts remind one of the women who think themselves well dressed merely because they have a new hat. They begin with one or two good players—when the stars happen to be good players—and immediately drop below mediocrity.

CHAPTER IX

STAGE DANCING

The Skirts of the Drama

A case lately came on for trial in Paris relating to a quarrel that arose a long time ago. Incidentally, it may be observed that "the law's delay" is even greater in France than over here, where, indeed, until the most august regions of the courts are reached procedure is comparatively rapid, and on the Chancery side cases are tried as hats are ironed, "while you wait." The question in Paris raises one of importance, but in itself is mere matter for merriment.

Mademoiselle Sarcy sued her manager because he tried to make her depart from traditions; and, although she is a prima ballerina, required her to wear flowing petticoats in the ballet of *Hérodiade*. The matter stirred Paris prodigiously.

With us, of course, the ballet has ceased to be of importance. In Mademoiselle Genée we had a dancer as well entitled to immortality as those about whom our fathers raved, and Russian dancers of brilliance have appeared, but opera and the legitimate theatre pay no attention to ballet except at pantomime season; and

whilst probably the average keen playgoer of Paris is acquainted with the names of the orthodox steps, and is aware that in the ballet one begins as *petit rat*, then becomes a quadrille ballerina, develops into a coryphée, blossoms into a minor subject, grows into a subject, and eventually emerges and reaches the stars as a prima ballerina, few of us know anything about the subject.

The whole fight in Paris raged round the question whether, regardless of period or nation or style of music, the prima ballerina is entitled to wear the scanty parasol skirt and petticoats in which she delights. The ladies of the ballet, with modern tradition on their side, resent any alteration in costume. The matter is not one of propriety in the ordinary sense of the word; the propriety of ballet costumes is out of the range of rational discussion. No one can doubt that if we had never seen anything but ordinary society drama and a ballet were launched at us in customary costume the police courts would take up the matter.

It is even known that there was a time (not Sir Henry's) when the Lord Chamberlain interfered at the Lyceum and was defeated by ridicule. Custom has settled the question of propriety, and it may be confidently asserted that it never occurs to the mind of the prima ballerina that any human being could regard her costume as indelicate. The trouble in Paris was that, despite the wish of the other persons concerned in the ballet, the star insisted upon proving lavishly to the public that she did not resemble the traditional Queen of Spain. She went further: she demanded her pound of flesh—or padding—she wished to exhibit what in technical slang is called *le tutu*, a term descriptive of the abbreviated costume and possessed also of a secondary meaning, which may be imagined by taking the ordinary tourist's pronunciation of the words and translating it. Trilby's "the altogether" in connexion with tights explains the matter.

The question is one of art, and here lies its humour. It is not physical vanity on the part of the ladies, for they know that sculptors would hardly choose as subjects the lower portion of women whose legs have been over-developed by a training so arduous that it is found almost impossible to get English girls to go through with it. But—and here's the rub—the dancer has a respect for her craft, which, like the actor's devotion to his art, tends to produce erroneous ideas, and this is why the fight has taken place.

At the bottom, it becomes a question of virtuosity. Art has suffered appallingly in every branch from the mania for cultivation of dexterity in accomplishment. To the prima ballerina the dancing is more important than the dance, to the actors the playing than the play, to many painters the *facture* than the picture, and so on. Music has been the main sufferer, particularly on the vocal side, and certain kinds of opera have been buried under the vocal acrobatics of the singers. One sees occasionally in shop windows, and, it may be, in human habitations, a species of abominable clock that has no kind of casing to conceal the works; it suggests the image of a prima ballerina. With the perfectly modest immodesty of the little boy cited in discussion by Laurence Sterne, she delights in exhibiting the works; more truthfully than a once famous conjuror, she insists upon showing us "how it is done"; and that really is quite the last thing a person of any taste wishes to know, or, rather, desires to have forced upon him.

Obviously, it is the duty of everyone who pretends to be educated to have some acquaintance with the mechanics of the different branches of art, but he does not want to be taught in public. Unfortunately the performer displays a natural desire to show his own cleverness rather than that of the dramatist. He treats himself as the cart when he is only the—horse.

Drama has suffered severely from this; indeed, in our theatres we have reached the topsy-turvydom of having the dramatist write for the players instead of having the players act for the dramatist. Sterile art is the general outcome. A great form of architecture perished with the architect who, forgetful of noble design, indulged in desperate *tours de force* and offered to the stonemason the opportunity of executing miracles in stone lacework.

Dancing has stood still since the dancers have gyrated frantically in order to prove their mechanical dexterity, and drama is in the doldrums because the players, with the assistance of the press, have induced the public to regard their performance as more important than the work which it is their duty to represent. The last statement is becoming inaccurate. It is hardly extravagant to say that when a play is written at the dictation of an actor the acting will be more important than the piece, for but little good work comes out of drama concocted under such circumstances.

The dancers are really dancing on the ruins of their art. They have lessened their skirts and their popularity at the same time. Old pictures show (and I believe that old measurements are preserved to indicate the fact) that in the days of the famous *pas de quatre*—not, of course, the one at the Gaiety—skirts were worn far longer than the modern *tutu*.

The costume of the prima ballerina assoluta in our grandfather's days was something like an umbrella and a pair of braces: the umbrella shrank to the *en-tout-cas*, and the *en-tout-cas* to the open parasol; unless the movement is arrested, in the course of time a lampshade will be reached, and ultimately, say, fifty years hence, the Genée of the period will have nothing more of skirt and petticoat than some kind of fringe round the waist, indicating, like our coccygeal vertebrae, or the rudimentary limbs of the whale, a mere useless atrophied apparatus.

It was once possible for the poses and movements of the dancer to be graceful—the phrase "the poetry of motion" had a meaning. With the stiff *tutu* sticking out almost at right angles, elegance is quite impossible. The present "star" resembles in outline one of the grotesques used by Hogarth to illustrate his theories in his "Analysis of Beauty," and one is inclined to laugh at her awkwardness when she walks; nor is it easy to admire when she whirls round like a dancing dervish, the *tutu* mounting higher and becoming more and more rectangular the faster she goes.

Mlle. Genée, delicious and graceful, in some flowing character-costume, and then ridiculous in the *tutu* that she adores, proved this more than any amount of written explanation. She was such a great performer, so perfect in mechanism, so harmonious from little foot to dainty head, so brilliant in her miming, that one was

forced to say sorrowfully "*Et tu-tu, Genée.*" Unfortunately the virtuoso mania is irresistible, and, so far as graceful dancing is concerned, there is no hope that we may see such a *pas de quatre* as won fame in the palmy days of the ballet; we have reached the reign of the *pas du tutu*, and, almost wish we had arrived at the *pas du tout*.

During the last few years there has been a great stir in the dancing world. Some time ago Isadora Duncan gave a private exhibition at the New Gallery of certain dances in a style intended to be a revival of old Greek dancing.

A little later Miss Ruth St Denis presented in public some strange, quite beautiful, performances consisting of dancing, miming and posturing supposed to suggest ideas of Indian life, and her finely restrained, truly artistic work deeply impressed both the critics and audiences.

Afterwards came Miss Maud Allan, alleged—no matter with what degree of truth—to be an imitator of Isadora Duncan, and she made a great "hit," her most popular performance being a "Salome" dance, which was considered by some people to be indecent. Certainly of her costume the French phrase "*qui commence trop tard et finit trop tôt*" might justly be used, for she carried nudity on the stage to a startling degree. In a good many other dances her work was rather pretty and quite unobjectionable, but vastly inferior to the art of Isadora Duncan or Ruth St Denis.

Isadora Duncan

The theatrical season of 1908 ended in a blaze of—dancing. At what is generally deemed about the dullest moment in the year Isadora Duncan appeared at the Duke of York's Theatre, and kept it open and well attended for almost a month. The affair is unique in the history of our theatre. One can imagine a playhouse running on the basis of a big ballet, with a story, popular music, magnificent scenery, gorgeous costumes, huge *corps de ballet*, half-a-dozen principals and immense advertisement. In this case we have had more or less isolated dances to music generally severe; for scenery only a background of subtle yellow, taking strange tones under the influence of different lights; for costumes only some beautiful, tranquil, simple Greek drapery; for *corps de ballet* a few children; for principals one woman, with an intelligent face, but certainly no great beauty; and in the way of advertisement very little, except some honestly enthusiastic press notices, and fortunately nothing in the form of photographs of nudities or half-nudities.

There has been a triumph of pure art under austere conditions, such as can hardly be recollected on our stage, unless in the case of *Everyman*—pure art akin to the theatrical, indeed parent of the drama. The word histrionic is derived through the Latin from an Etruscan word which means "to leap" and was originally applied to dancers.

Historically, the matter is interesting. Drama began in dance and developed from it, dance and drama going hand-in-hand for a long while; then a separation came, and dance has tended more and more to become meaningless and conventional, and, in the chief school of dancing, purely technical. The Spanish school is still alive, reinforced by the North African, and in the main showing some tendency, often perfectly restrained, towards the indecent. Our own step-dancing remains popular, and for a while the hybrid skirt-dancing triumphed, chiefly because of the genius of Kate Vaughan and talent of her successors, one of whom, Katie Seymour, worked out a clever individual compound of styles.

The "Classic" school, classic in quite a secondary sense, which has been represented by what one can conveniently call the ballet, year after year has worked towards its extinction by the over-cultivation of mere technique, of execution rather than imagination.

The greatest artist of this school in our times is Genée; natural grace, a piquant individuality, and a fine power of miming, have lent charm to work the foundation of which is really acrobatic, and consists of remarkable feats made too manifest by an abominably ugly costume.

Isadora Duncan goes back in style to the early Greek; dancing, however, necessarily to more modern music, for the reason that we do not know how to reproduce much of the old, and possibly would not like it if we could. To her work one may apply the phrase of Simonides, that "dancing is silent poetry." Preferable is the term that has been used concerning architecture: Schelling, in his "*Philosophie der Kunst*," calls it "frozen music," a term ridiculed by Madame de Staël. Peter Legh wrote a book on the topic, published in 1831, with the title "*The Music of the Eye*." The book is poor, pretentious stuff, but the title seems nicely applicable to the dancing of Isadora Duncan. To a deaf man her work would be entirely musical—to a Beethoven or Robert Franz, deaf after, for a while, full enjoyment of sound, her dances would, I believe, represent complete, delightful, musical impressions.

It may be that sometimes in her work she attempts impossible subtleties, endeavouring to express ideas beyond the range of melody—for it is difficult to imagine that any dancing can be more than expressive of melody, though no doubt to make this true "melody" must be understood in a large sense. How far away this is from dancing which consists in the main of executing more or less complicated steps "in time" with the music, or such appalling vulgarities as a cake-walk. It must be admitted that one of the Tanagra figurines is sadly suggestive of a characteristic pose in the cake-walk—though it may well be that it is a mere pose which led to none of the abominations with which our stage has been deluged!

In the case of Isadora Duncan we have seen poses and movements of extraordinary beauty, exquisitely sympathetic with fine music. No doubt occasionally she has made a concession, as on her first night, when she danced to "*The Blue Danube*" waltz by way of an encore, putting, however, her own interpretation on the music and her sense of it. Those who are acquainted with Greek sculpture and with some of the classic drawings of the old masters will see that to a very large extent her work is a revival rather than an invention; but this fact—which she acknowledges—in no degree diminishes the merit of her performances, for the

execution is of wonderful beauty and the application of the old ideas to music of a different type is very clever.

Her work alone has well repaid the audiences, many members of which have made several visits to the theatre; it has, however, been supplemented by dances in which young children were the performers, dances so pretty in conception and delightful in execution that one has felt the whole house thrilling with pleasure. Nothing like these children dances, nothing of the kind half as charming, has been given on the stage in our day.

The one complaint possible against Isadora Duncan is that she has rendered us immoderately dissatisfied with what had once moderately contented us; and the fear is that we shall promptly have a host of half-baked imitators, who will copy the mere accidentals of her system without understanding the essentials, and will fancy that the whole matter is one of clothes and music, and prance about bare-legged, meaninglessly. It is hard to see how this is to be avoided until there has been time for her pupils to grow up; it is certain, however, that if the new idea, the new-old idea, takes root, there will be a revolution in dancing, which may have far-reaching effects.

Drama of the strictly intellectual type will remain unaffected; possibly there will be a new development of the musico-dramatic. It has been suggested that musical comedy is waning, and the period has been reached when the average piece of this class spells failure. There is, of course, nothing in the work of Isadora Duncan which limits it to one principal, and naught to prevent the combination of singing and dancing. Off-hand it seems rash to suggest that spoken dialogue could be harmonized with these. It is imaginable that the authors of *Prunella* could see their way to combine with work somewhat on the lines of their charming piece such ideas of dancing as have been suggested by Isadora Duncan. The result should be a novel, delightful form of art, not necessarily hybrid.

After Isadora Duncan's public performances came the deluge and the country was flooded with women indecently unclad, who flapped about on the stage displaying their persons and their incompetence lavishly. The authorities have been very lax as regards such performances, many of which were so obviously crude and clumsy that it was clear that a *succès de scandale* was sought deliberately. Of course some of the performers may have had merit. Later on (in 1910) there arrived some brilliant Russian dancers whose work is of too great value and importance to be dealt with in a single paragraph.

CHAPTER X

THINGS IN THE THEATRE

A Defence of the Matinée Hat

The number of matinées at Christmas-time has caused the usual outcry against the matinée hat, and wrathful or sarcastic letters on the subject; and it is said that some French managers are taking the strong step of excluding from the front rows those ladies who, to use the queer Gallic term, are not "*en cheveux*." It seems surprising that an evil denounced so universally should be permitted to exist, and that loud complaints made during many years should have had little or no effect.

The average man regards the matter as quite simple, and wonders why women are so selfish as to keep on their hats, and thinks that there is no reasonable explanation of their conduct or excuse for it. It seemed clear that there must be greater difficulties than are obvious. So questions were put to an ardent playgoer, who spends appalling sums of money on her dress, as to why she makes a fuss about taking off her hat in the theatre.

"My good man," she said to the questioner, "you are talking 'through your hat' as well as about mine. If my hair was as simple a matter as yours—" this hit at his unprotected pate seemed rather a blow below the belt—"there would be no difficulty. Unfortunately, it is a very complex matter." He hid all but the smallest conceivable fraction of a smile. "I am not referring to colour," she continued with some asperity, "but to the fact that, at present, fashion requires me to wear a prodigious number of little curls. My native crop is ample in quantity, but I should hardly be in time for a matinée or even an evening performance if I had it turned into all these little necessary curls. So, like most of my friends, in order to save time and trouble, I have a number which are pinned on. Do you think I care to run the risk of removing my hat without even a looking-glass to guide me? Heaven knows what might happen. The case is a little better, though far from satisfactory, with those who wear nothing but their own crop."

This view of the subject seemed to have something in it, a fact which, of course, could not be admitted. There were, not long before, in *The Westminster Gazette* some remarks by "Madame Qui Vive" to the effect that even a female Absalom or a Mélisande could not do without what she called the "clever devices of the coiffeur," and claims were made of woman's right to adopt the fashion of the days when both men and women wore wigs, on the ground that the coiffeur's "little devices"—English for sham curls—save time, and also remain "trimmer and neater" than natural curls.

"Do you think," she said, "that it is pleasant to hold an eight or ten guinea hat on your knees, to say nothing

of a boa and muff and veil? And what about the damage to a delicate hat caused by people who shove in front of you and brush against it and crush the tulle and break the feathers? A lot of style it possesses after being treated in that fashion!"

"Don't you think you might have special hats for matinées—something undamageable."

"Perhaps you would like to see me in a tam-o'-shanter, or a yachting cap, or one of those nice 'sensible' straw hats you men admire; and suppose I want to go to a lunch *en route* for the play, or tea afterwards, or to drive in the Park, or to go anywhere except to my *cabinet de toilette*?"

"They might make you something extra small and low that would serve for all these purposes."

"Indeed; don't you think half-a-guinea is enough to pay for a stall without buying a special hat into the bargain? A nice fuss my husband would make about my extravagance. Besides, people want us to wear no hat at all. What does your wife do?"

The interviewer replied that his wife thought it her duty to take off her hat.

"She behaves better than many ladies of the theatrical world. The other day I could not see a bit because of the enormous hat worn by Miss —, and Miss — and Miss — were just as bad."

It would be pleasant to give the names which would identify popular actresses who are great shiners in this matter.

"Moreover," she continued, "there is the difficulty of putting it on again. You men wear your hats on your heads, and can easily get them straight; we don't, we wear them on our hair, or our scalpettes, or our transformations, or on any *postiche* that may be fashionable or necessary, and can only tell whether they are straight, or even the right way round, by means of a looking-glass. A pretty thing if I were to sail out of a theatre with my hat really askew, or before behind; people might fail to take a charitable view of the situation, and suspect I had had a glass too much instead of a glass too little."

"All this is irrelevant," said the interviewer, "and the whole difficulty is—you are too mean to go to the ladies' room and pay or give sixpence to the attendant."

She smiled pityingly.

"My dear man, you grumble about our being late at the theatre. What would happen if fifty of us were to take off our hats and touch up our hair in a room too small for fifteen, before taking our seats? I know one ladies' room where there is only one looking-glass, and there are only a few horrid little hooks on which to hang hats and veils. I would gladly patronize the waiting-room if there were ample accommodation, but that would be out of the question in most theatres, and one would have to come much too early and get away needlessly late; and there might be little mistakes about the hats and furs unless half-a-dozen attendants were provided, for it can't be a simple question of handing hats and coats over the counter as it is with you men."

It is undeniable that in some cases the ladies' cloak-rooms have not been designed so as to deal with the question under discussion, because, of course, theatres are primarily built for the evening performances, and matinées are only a little extra as a rule.

"The matter," said the lady thoughtfully, "is more important than you think. I consider that the matinée hat has settled the fate of many new enterprises. If the lady is asked to take off her hat and does not, she is uncomfortable during the afternoon, because she knows the people are hating her, not quite unjustly, and also because they sometimes whisper at her offensively. If she does take it off she is worried lest she has made a guy of herself; she is often upset because her hat has been crushed, and her mind is distracted by wonder if she will get it on right at the end. The result is that she is in a bad mood for the play and judges it unfairly.

"I think something could be done. The seats might be so arranged as to have an open box underneath each stall for the hat and muff of the lady immediately behind. I do not say it would be easy to get at them; but even in the case of the narrowest stalls—and many are an outrage—it would be possible. Something of the sort indeed exists at one or two theatres, such as the Haymarket. Of course the cartwheel hats would not go into them, but ladies don't wear such things, only women who want to advertize themselves. Next," she continued, "comes the question of the looking-glass. I have made efforts to use a small *miroir de poche*, but it is far from adequate. In cases where the backs of the stalls are of a good height, a fair-sized mirror might be fixed high up on the back, with some little contrivance in the way of a curtain which could be drawn over it; and aided by these we might be able to grapple with our difficulties."

A penny-in-the-slot mirror might pay.

A Justification of certain Deadheads

In efforts, certainly justifiable, to discover the reason for the failure of the theatrical season, some people have made quite a ferocious attack upon the "deadhead," who really has nothing to do with the case. He has been spoken of as an incubus. Some people regard the free entry of the *caput mortuum* with a hostility like that shown by our ancestors (and to some extent ourselves) to the mortmain of the Church.

Let us consider the deadhead for a while. First, it is necessary to point out that there are several species. The genus includes all members of the audience who do not pay for their seats. Of course the species of deadhead critic is not attacked on this particular point; yet indirectly some members of it affect the situation, for it is said that there are critics who demand a good deal of "paper" for their friends from managers, even

when the tickets are really saleable.

London critics are not treated like their brethren in Paris—the great city in which drama flourishes—where a reverence is exhibited for our craft not manifested in London. On a first night over here you will find that in many theatres the representatives of first-class papers are in back rows of the stalls or in the dress circle, whilst deadheads of another species are occupying most of the better places. Moreover, there are very, very few journals to which more than one ticket is sent.

The next kind of deadhead is the unprofessional first-night deadhead, a mixture of personal friends of the manager, the author, the principal players and of "the backers," if any. It is said that they are the most troublesome of all to handle, being utterly unreasonable as a body, and refusing contemptuously seats accepted without a murmur by newspapers that have a million or so of readers. Many are only willing to lend the support of their presence on the first night; seats for the second or a later night are scorned. In this class may be reckoned members of *the* profession, who, with a strange disregard for the convenience of the management, demand a couple of stalls for the *première*, though they are in the habit of complaining that a first performance does justice neither to the piece nor to the players. Lastly, in the group of first-night deadheads come the members of the unrecognised, ill-organised, generally tactless claue.

The species that lately has been attacked is divisible into two groups. The first consists of the people who will not go to the theatre without an order, but do not expect first-night tickets—one may call them the "cadgers." The second species might be entitled the "window-dressers." Volumes have been written about the "cadgers," and countless stories told. No doubt they cause trouble and some expense in stamps, stationery and clerical work. Probably they do not really affect the fate of a piece, for there seems no reason to doubt the truth of the general assertion, that nearly all of them would stay away if they could not get a ticket for nothing.

Now we come to the really lamentable class, people who have to be brought into a theatre "with a lasso," to use an American term. Let us look at the position—the melancholy position. The play is not quite a hopeless failure; it is in a Mahomet's coffin position. If it can last a little longer the season may improve and money be made; or it is neither making nor losing on ordinary nights and does paying business on Saturdays. There is a third state of affairs—perhaps the commonest: it is necessary to keep the piece running for a certain number of weeks, even at a loss, in order that it may visit the provinces and the colonies or the States as a big London success that has enjoyed a long run. Yet paying playgoers keep aloof.

What is the manager to do? If his house is but half full the applause will be faint, the players are likely to act without spirit, and, worse still, the audience may be chilled, and the members of it will tell their friends that the house was almost empty, thereby causing them to think that the entertainment is poor. So half full might become quite empty. What method does the manager adopt? He knows that the general public is as uncritical of an audience as of a play or of acting, so he fills his house as well as he can with the very deadiest of deadheads; "orders" are distributed lavishly to people whose presence in the theatre is actually a favour to the management.

It is said that these playgoers are peculiarly severe in their judgments and remarkably apathetic! To the truth of part of this we can testify, since we study such deadheads with great curiosity on the occasions, rather rare, when we see them, for sometimes a dramatic critic gets taken to the theatre by a friend. We think ourselves very famous, yet most of us have friends ignorant of the fact that our trade is to criticize plays. The position is a little quaint; one is asked to dine at about the time that is customary to take afternoon tea; the dinner is short though, if at a fashionable restaurant, the waits are long; and there comes an awful moment when the host mentions that he has got six stalls for the ——. Generally there is some friend present who knows the true position, and exhibits a smile of fiendish mirth.

When this happens we examine the professional deadhead with interest. He reminds one of the hired mourner at the Hebrew funeral. Fantastic clothes, strange devices for keeping shirt-fronts clean, queer contrivances for protecting the throat during the bus-ride home, furtive umbrellas, ample reticules (in which perhaps goloshes are hidden), and a genteel reticence in applause or laughter, are marks of the stranger in the stalls—the harmless, necessary deadhead. He may not be ornamental, nor even she, despite her sex; perhaps they give little encouragement to the players; they bring nothing directly to the exchequer, but they fill a place.

Few of us do more; some of us merely fill a column, and wish we did that duty as conscientiously as most of these poor creatures do theirs, for, though obviously determined not to enjoy themselves, they come punctually, do not cause inconvenience by going out between the acts to waste money on high-priced refreshments, and remain in their places to the bitter end—unlike the cash patrons, so many of whom bustle away brutally towards the close of the entertainment for fear lest they should miss the chance of earning a nightmare at a fashionable restaurant. Seeing what service they render to the managers the deadheads are perhaps entitled to the protection of the phrase "*de mortuis*."

The foregoing article brought several letters, amongst them one that deserves a little consideration. All responsibility is disclaimed for the letter that is published verbatim:

DEAR SIR,—I have lately read an article by you on the subject of the matinée hat, with almost every word of which I have the honour of expressing my entire disagreement. Although your views on the topic may be absurd, they show that you have a mind capable of appreciating more than one side of a case; so I venture to write to you about the great question of the day, the proposed suppression of the deadhead. "Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend," to use the words of the bard; to think that after all our services to them, the managers, too blind to see the obvious causes of their distress, should dream of abolishing the "harmless necessary" deadhead, who often has rendered to them assistance like that of the mouse "i' the fable" to the lion.

Permit me to discuss the matter seriously. Let me begin by employing, with trifling modification, a famous phrase by one of the dramatists of the land from which most of our English drama comes: "There are deadheads and deadheads!" They may be put into two main groups—the first-night deadheads and the other-nights deadheads—and there are subdivisions. Few save those immediately concerned would mourn if the first group were abolished—you can guess that I do not belong to it. Yet I am well acquainted with the group, since a cousin of mine, long time a popular actor, has been of late a too-frequent attendant at these functions.

Of first-night deadheads there are four varieties: Friends of the management, including their brother pros.; friends of the author; friends of principal players in the cast; and the critics. It is a source of great joy to my cousin to see that on these occasion the managers know how to put the critics in their proper places, grouping them, for instance, in rows of stalls bearing the more remote letters of the alphabet, whilst between them and the footlights come the deadheads of the other varieties.

Personally, I wonder whether it is wise to put the gentry of the pen in seats from which they often hear with difficulty, and see without accuracy, in rows of seats normally belonging to the pit, and merely posing, *pro hoc vice*, as stalls, and situate in the headachy region underneath the dress circle.

According to my cousin, the first-night deadheads, as a body, are unpunctual and unappreciative. They chatter a good deal and seem more interested in the audience than the play, and might well be replaced by the many people who would be glad to plank down their money for a seat. Let them go; and I warrant the managers will be none the worse—I should, indeed, except the gentlemen of the Fourth Estate.

The case of myself and the deadheads of other nights is quite different. The managers will find it difficult to do without us.

We are present as much for their benefit as for our pleasure.

Constatons les faits, if I may borrow another phrase from the French. Under what circumstances are we invited? When a play is doing good business? Certainly not. It is when the company are discussing in whispers whether the notice will go up or not, that the Fiery Cross is sent round to us and we come and fill the house. Without us there would be an aching void, and the few paying people, aghast at the gloom, would spread very bad reports. Managers, like nature, abhor a vacuum. Our presence saves the situation and the face of the management. No doubt our assistance is often vain, but the cases are numerous when, thanks to us, the management has been able to tide over a bad week or two during a run.

"They also serve who only sit and watch" is our motto, taken, you will see, from a line by the "organ-mouthed voice of England." Would not *Dorothy* have died young but for our intervention? Would not *The Lion and the Mouse* have enjoyed the success it deserved if we had been called in to dress the house until the public had discovered the piece? Many are the cases where, during weeks of bad weather or sudden gloom we have rallied loyally to the theatre and kept a play going.

Do services such as this count for nothing? Is my occupation to become like that of the Moor of Venice—merely because managers are forgetful? Do we make no sacrifices when we come to their aid? What about the expense of coming to and fro? What about wear and tear of dress clothes, useless to some of us except for such purposes, and, in honesty I should add, so far as the nether portions are concerned, for attending funerals?

Let me discuss what is urged against us. It is said that if we did not get free tickets we should pay to visit the play. There is a little truth in this, but not much. We might take tickets for the pit to see the good plays; our judgment tells us they are but few, whereas a sense of duty compels us in our quasi-professional capacity to attend even the most deplorable rubbish. This aspect of the matter amounts to no more than a trifle. The managers would gain little from our occasional shillings and lose much by our frequent absence.

It is urged that we do not applaud. I maintain that deceitful applause is not in our implied contract; certainly we never hiss or boo, though there is a splendid tradition rendered popular by poor Lal Brough that one of us found a play so utterly bad that he left his seat, went to the box-office, and bought a ticket, in order that he might express his opinion without prejudice to his conscience. As a body we are playgoers of judgment and experience, and, though I protest that we clap generously when there is a reasonable opportunity, the suggestion that we are a claque failing to do its duty because we do not applaud bad pieces is an outrageous insult.

No, sir; I do but humbly voice the opinion of my fellow-deadheads when I say that we would rather be abolished than have to offer sycophantic applause as part of the bargain. I insist a little upon this aspect, because the refusal to applaud rubbish seems to be looked upon as the dead head and front of our offending, if I may take a trifling liberty with the words of the Swan of Avon.

I had forgotten, sir, to mention one of our most important services. It is notorious that many plays are run in London without there being any expectation that they will make money in the Metropolis, but in the belief that if they can be called "a great London success," our simple-minded cousins in the country will accept them with enthusiasm. How, I ask you, are these London successes manufactured? How could they be without our aid? I could name plays that have been run for a hundred nights in town at a heavy loss, and yet have proved gold-mines; and I have visited them at the call of duty and seen with my trained eyes so few of the paying public that a mere sense of decency would have compelled the managers to close the doors if we had not been present.

Our assistance on these occasions is an odious part of our duty. It goes sadly against my conscience to be one of a kind of stage-army audience, playing a part in order to deceive country or colonial managers into the belief that some piece of rubbish has had a genuinely successful London run. Is not service of this character to be counted? Surely, at the least, if we are to be abolished it should be recognized that the old hands

amongst us are entitled to some compensation. Why, sir, seeing that serious politicians do not propose to suppress licences for the sale of poisons without giving compensations, surely we, who have done much and suffered much, ought not to be put into limbo without some recognition of our services. I remain, yours sincerely,

CAPUT MORTUUM

Just a line. On careful consideration of this letter, it seems only right to make a suggestion that some doubts exist whether it is entirely genuine, but it certainly appears to contain some grains of truth.

Theatrical Advertisements

It may be doubted whether the historian will call our period "the age of advertisement," though some have thought so. For there are such rapid and prodigious growths in the base craft of beating the big drum that our most audacious and colossal efforts may, to our grandchildren, seem like a Brown Bess to a modern repeater in comparison with their means of man-allurement. Of all the arts the one relying most upon advertisement is the drama; yet the phrase is half-unjust to real drama.

Perhaps it is fairer to say that there is more advertisement in connexion with the theatrical art than any other, or, indeed, all the others put together. The position is surprising; a large mass of the reading matter of the London papers is filled with copy concerning the theatres and players, though only a small percentage is criticism. More people would recognize each of thirty popular performers than could identify even one of the great in other branches of art or in science. A recent squabble about a couple of actresses has been the subject of greater fuss than would be caused by the discovery of the lost books of Livy, of a picture by Apelles, of the MS. of an unknown opera by Beethoven, of a method of making accumulators out of *papier-maché*, or a mode of manufacturing radium at a cost of twopence a pound. There have been thousands of columns printed concerning the marriages of (so-called) actresses to young gentlemen of family.

A digression about these marriages is permissible. Each has led to many articles on alliances between the aristocracy and the stage, and lists of the ladies who in our times have honoured (or dishonoured) the nobility with their hands have been given. Yet there has been little comment upon the fact that, with two or three exceptions, the so-called actresses have had no position of importance in the legitimate ranks of the profession. A woman may perform in a theatre, and even draw a big salary, without being an actress, and she may have brains, beauty and popularity, and nevertheless enjoy little chance of marrying anybody with a "handle to his name," if she confines her work to the non-musical stage.

A distinction suggests itself—it might be that in music and the love of it by the nobly born lies the explanation of the phenomenon; it might be that the blue-blooded youths captured these charmers of the musico-dramatic department in order to enjoy a selfish monopoly of lovely voices, but such is not the case. Two or three of the ladies who have won their way to the "hupper succles" possess talent; one of them has a beautiful voice and great gifts as an actress, and one was a brilliant dancer and became an excellent comedienne. The ruck and run of them, however, have triumphed owing to advertisement in subtle and also in crude forms.

Really the actresses of legitimate drama, whom one should call the *actresses*, have a grievance not merely in the fact that the peerage does not woo them (since in a good many instances the bride has paid dearly for her elevation), nor merely because women of the oldest profession open to the sex miscall themselves actresses when in trouble—the term actress being like the word "charity"—but because their title includes many persons of notoriety who, if forced to rely solely upon their talent, could hardly earn a pound a week in true drama. "True drama," for the common term "musico-dramatic" points to the fact that the fortunate nymphs belong to the lighter (and sometimes degraded) forms of musical work and not of the legitimate drama. Some wag, no doubt, has called their branch the *leg-itimate* drama.

In the mid-Victorian days the advertisements of drama were trifling. Thirty years ago the photographs of Miss Maud Branscombe, a real beauty, but not an actress of great quality, created quite a stir, and made her name well known throughout the land; and the publication of them was, probably, the beginning of the present deluge. The two illustrated papers of importance published pictures only of actresses who by means of their talent had made a genuine sensation; and therefore but few were presented in the year. Nowadays there are from thirty to forty photographs a week in the illustrated papers of actresses—using the term in its widest sense.

Many young ladies, who twenty years ago could not by any decent means have got their likenesses exhibited to the public except in shop-window photographs, now simper at us fifty-two times a year, or more, and are sometimes described as "the celebrated actress," though a few of them never get beyond the dignity of a single silly line in the book of a musical hodge-podge. Miss XXX smiles at us from her 40-h.p. "bloater car" which has cost a larger sum than eight years of her salary, and the simple-minded think she must be a great star to be able to afford such a luxury, not knowing that she herself is the luxury which someone else is unable to afford. The humble old devices are now stale tricks. The actress in search of notoriety does not lose her jewels: she brings an action which is reported at great length, and during it half-a-dozen members of the profession get a splendid chance of blowing their own trumpets. There was a cruel case a little while ago: one of these "damaged darlings" of the stage did lose her jewels—which had cost about as much as that admirable actress Amy Roselle earned in her honourable career with a tragic ending—but felt bound to keep silent about the loss, since to have mentioned it would have seemed like "out-of-date" advertising. "View jew," she called it.

It would be unfair to suggest that the ladies have a monopoly, for many of the actors also are busy in the art of advertisement—some so busy as to have little time to study the technique of their art. However, they get rather less help from the illustrated papers, for reasons not quite obvious, if it be correct, as some suppose,

that the picture journals are bought for the—not by—the ladies of the family.

The puff system is disadvantageous to the managers, since they have to pay fancy prices for the services of players, no better than others who could be engaged at humble rates, because they have acquired a specious importance by advertisement. The result has been a prodigious increase of salaries, without any corresponding gain in revenue, for although the much-"boomed" artist may attract people to a particular theatre, it is not to be assumed that the quantity of playgoers is increased, or that more money is spent on the whole by the public because of all this advertising.

The consequence to the managers, as a rule, is that expenditure is much greater, but the total amount of receipts remains the same. Yet the managers as a body are not to be pitied, since not only do they, unwisely, assist in this artificial glorification of the members of their companies, but some of them also push the advertisement of their theatres beyond delicate limits, and by the cunning strenuous efforts of their "press agents" and others beat the big drum very loudly, sometimes sounding a false note, as when they publish, in advertisements, garbled criticisms upon their wares.

There are some in the theatrical world who dislike and disdain the illegitimate advertisement. Others there are less nicely scrupulous, perhaps, but not sufficiently "smart" or lucky enough to "boom" themselves. These suffer. Advertisement is to the theatrical world like ground bait to anglers. We who, to some extent are behind the scenes, know too well how many admirable actors and actresses have a hard fight for a bare living because their places are taken by people of less knowledge and skill, but more "push" and cunning. Even the general rise in salaries does not help these reticent players, for a salary at the rate of twenty pounds a week is not very useful if you are resting ten months in the year.

It is quite incontestable that we journalists are to be blamed. We help in the "booming"; we are the big drum, the players provide their own trumpets. A conspiracy of silence on our part would do much to mend matters. If for a little while we were to suppress the "personal pars." and keep out the photographs and only write concerning the theatres strictly as critics, a great change would take place. Probably the revenue of the theatres would not diminish sensibly, but the expenses would. Managers and players would be forced to rely for success upon merit and nothing else, and as a result the standard of drama and acting would be raised. This has been so far perceived that even people belonging to the other side of the footlights have expressed publicly the opinion that the unsatisfactory state of the theatres is partly due to their being too much talked and written about.

Rosalind's phrase that a "good wine needs no bush" is but partly true; merit rarely succeeds by its own virtue when it has to meet unfair competition in the shape of advertisement.

Music

A little while ago a man, who had not been to the theatre for some years, was asked his reason. "The last time I went," he replied, "it was to a tragedy, well written and interesting, if hardly inspired, and after the first act the band—nobody would call it an 'orchestra'—played a thing called 'The Washington Post,' which I discovered by the aid of the programme was written by a noise-concocter called Sousa. I sat it out; I had no choice, for I was in the middle of a row, and in order to escape I should have had to trample upon a dozen inoffensive strangers. During the next act the abominable noise kept coming back into my ears and distracting me, so the drama was ruined for me."

It was pointed out to him that Mr Sousa is a very popular composer, that millions of people love his compositions, that it is merely a minority, contemptible in number, which loathes them. Still he caused thoughts. For a long time the musical folk have regarded the *entr'acte* music simply as one of the unavoidable discomforts of the playhouse; but, really, managers might be more careful. Apparently it is impossible to deal satisfactorily with the question. There is a horrible dilemma; if the music is good you cannot enjoy it, because you can hardly hear it, for the audience talk too loudly, and there is the bustle of people coming in and out, and one catches the voices of young ladies inviting people in the stalls to take tea or coffee or to buy chocolates, and the occupants of the pit to refresh themselves with "ginger-beer, lemonade, bottled ale or stout," a phrase to which they give a species of rhythmical crescendo.

The difficulty is enhanced in some houses by the fact that the orchestra is hidden in a species of box which is almost noise-proof. On the other hand, if the music is bad—generally the case—well, it is bad; worse, still, you can hear it easily. There is a kind of kink in nature which breeds the law that very small interruptions will mar your pleasure in good music, but nothing less than a dynamite explosion can drown the bad; even cotton wool in your ears or the wax employed by the sailors of Ulysses will not keep it out.

Some time ago Miss Lena Ashwell added to the debt of playgoers towards her by installing an admirable string quartet, which rendered real music so well that many people went to her theatre almost as much for the music as for the drama. Alas! the string quartet soon disappeared. Inquiries—of course not of persons officially connected with the theatre—disclosed the fact that there had been many complaints. People found it difficult to hear themselves talk, and when they talked loud enough playgoers who were enjoying the music said "Hush!" and in other ways suggested that they thought it bad form to chatter whilst the quartet was playing; so Miss Ashwell—very reluctantly—was forced to change the system.

The Kingsway Theatre formed an exception—not, indeed, the only exception—to these remarks. The whole question is very difficult. Theoretically, at least, it is deplorable that there should be any interruption from the beginning to the end of a play. Dramas, for full effect, should be in one act, or if they are too long, and if a concession must be made to human physical weakness, if an opportunity must be given to people to stretch themselves or move in their seats, there should be an interval of absolute silence or occupied by music finely indicative of the emotional states intended to be created by the drama.

This no doubt is a theory demanding perfection. Up to a certain point efforts are made to realize it. Under the generous management of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, we often have music composed expressly for the drama by musicians of quality, and sometimes it is well enough written to deserve and afterwards obtain performance in the concert-room. Yet in a sense it is a failure, since it is imperfectly heard in the theatre; the fault lies with the audience, but it is hard to blame the members of it. There is no crime in not being musical, despite Shakespeare's prodigious phrase, "The man that hath no music in himself ... is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils," or Congreve's phrase concerning music and the savage breast. We know that there are many people otherwise finely equipped and alert in matters of art who have no taste in or for music; that there are some of irreproachable judgment in literature or painting who, like the officer in the story, recognize no tune save "God Save the King," and that only because people stand up when it is played. Also we are aware that some musicians are utter Philistines so far as other branches of art are concerned.

It is difficult enough to get people to patronize the theatres, and it would be madness to keep any away by requiring them to make great sacrifices on the altar of music.

The fact remains that the selection of music is often very carelessly or foolishly made. To begin with, there is an appalling lack of variety. At one period "Pomp and Circumstance" was played in almost every theatre, sometimes well, often badly, till we got sick of it. Pieces such as "Après le Bal" and "Simple Aveu" were hurled at us every night. A statement of the number of times that Nicolai's overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* has been played in the theatres would stagger people; Gounod's *Faust* music and Edward German's charming dances from *Henry VIII.*, and one or two overtures by Suppé and the Stradella music, have become intolerable.

Without posing as the so-called "superior person," without demanding unpopular classics or asking for the performance of serious chamber music or severe symphonies, or expressing a desire for Bach—a holiday might very well be given to the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria"—we merely pray for greater variety and also for more careful consideration of the congruity between the play and the character of the *entr'acte* and introductory music.

It should be the duty of somebody to see that an effort is made to confine the music to works harmonious with the emotions which the dramatist intends to excite. We ought not to have the "Teddy Bears' Picnic" just after hearing the heroine weep over the idea that her husband is faithless; whilst the feelings caused by the agonies of Othello are not strengthened by hearing the "Light Cavalry" overture; and the *Faust* ballad music falls queerly upon the despair of the hero when he learns that he is ruined. It may be admitted that in many instances an effort is made to carry out these entirely unoriginal views, but even in some of our most carefully conducted playhouses there are strange lapses.

There is another point. It very often happens that the list of pieces printed upon the programme, for which in most of the theatres a charge of sixpence is made, is a mere snare. Sometimes none of the pieces mentioned is played, whilst to alter the order is quite a common matter. No doubt this gives some uncharitable amusement to people who overhear the conversation of ignorant playgoers misled by the programme. There was an unfortunate foreigner who said to his neighbour, "*Pas un aigle, leur fameux Elgar*" when he thought he was listening to "Pomp and Circumstance," whilst the orchestra in fact was playing "Whistling Rufus."

The ideal system, no doubt, was that of Miss Ashwell, who gave a long list of pieces in the programme with numbers to them, and then had the number appropriate to the particular work hoisted before it was played. This is only the ideal in one sense. In reality, the best course is suggested by a famous maxim: "*Optima medicina est medicina non uti.*" The Stage Society is wise in following the custom sanctioned by such an august institution as La Comédie Française. After all, we want to make the theatres less of a gamble and to reduce needless expenses so as not to render the battle a triumph for the long purse. If the orchestras of the theatres were in the habit of giving a real service to music by producing the shorter pieces of talented composers who are struggling for recognition; if, as might well be the case, they offered a hearing to the young musicians of talent of whom we now have plenty, then no doubt they would deserve encouragement. As the matter stands, they perform too small a service to music to warrant the tax imposed by them on drama.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE PLAYHOUSE

Laughter

Of late years there has been a good deal of censure, most of it unwritten, upon the stage management of plays. Despite brilliant exhibitions of the art of stage management by people such as Pinero and Mr Granville Barker, there have been more bad performances in modern times than of old.

The matter is one into which it is needless to go at large upon the present occasion; yet there is one vice that should be mentioned. We often have much loud laughter upon the stage that hardly causes so much as a faint echo on the other side of the footlights. Now, when the characters in a piece laugh heartily, or at least loudly, at something supposed to divert them, which does not appeal successfully to the sense of humour of the audience, the effect is disastrous. It is exasperating to hear laughter—even feigned laughter—in which one cannot join.

There are people who believe that laughter is infectious, and that if the persons of the play laugh a great deal the audience will catch the infection. This is not universally or even generally true. A few individual players no doubt have an infectious laugh. Samary was famous for it, and her laughter in one of Molière's farces drew all Paris; and another French actress by her prodigious laughter in a farce at the Royalty raised the audience to hearty sympathetic outbursts. Most players, however, though they may mimic laughter very well, are unable to make the audience laugh sympathetically, unless really amused by what is supposed to entertain the characters of the play.

If someone were to invent a laughter-recording machine and use it in the theatre during farces the stage-managers would be amazed to find how often it happens that the noise of laughter made by two or three persons on the stage is greater than that made by the whole audience; whenever this occurs it is certain that a kind of irritation is being bred in the house for which someone has to suffer.

This is the sort of thing that happens. A character enters and announces that something very ludicrous has befallen another character, and proceeds to state what it is to the other persons in the scene, the statement being interrupted by his outbursts of laughter, and they in turn roar and hold their sides; yet often enough what is being told does not seem very amusing to us—even, perhaps, appears puerile—so we are vexed, and smile coldly at the piece and players. If the laughter on the stage were more moderate ours would not be the less, and we should feel more benevolent to the play and laugh with greater freedom if and when something funny took place.

The whole question of laughter is curious and difficult. There is one fairly constant first-nighter whose loud laughter upon insufficient provocation sometimes irritates the house, to the prejudice of the play; not long ago one of our young actresses laughed so immoderately, as a spectator, at trifles during a performance that some of the audience actually uttered inarticulate sounds, intended to suggest to her that she should be quieter.

Everybody knows the terrible people who laugh in a theatre at the wrong place, or indulge in the wrong kind of laughter, and are hilarious during pathetic passages, the pathos of which is heightened by touches of cruel humour. Some commit this crime from simple stupidity, not perceiving that the humour is tragic, not comic; others because they think that dignity of character is shown if they refuse to be moved by imaginary woes. The person is hateful who cannot shed an honest, if furtive, tear at a finely conceived and executed pathetic incident in a play, and the more if he is proud of his insensibility or lack of imagination; and we love an honest fellow who, like Jules Janin, wept "*comme un veau*" during *La Dame aux Camellias*. Such insensible creatures resemble "the man that hath no music in himself." Sometimes their conduct is so severely resented by audible protest that they are shamed into restraint.

It seems quite a long time since we have had a genuine debauch of hearty laughter in the theatre, of "Laughter holding both his sides." There has been a great deal of laughter, but it must be remembered that there are several kinds of laughter. So much difference exists between one species of laughter and another that the close observer can guess from the nature of the laughter in the theatre what is the sort of piece which provokes it.

No doubt the subject of laughter is one of great difficulty. On the point one may quote a passage from Darwin: "Many curious discussions have been written on the causes of laughter with grown-up persons. The subject is extremely complex ... laughter seems primarily to be the expression of mere joy or happiness. The laughter of the gods is described by Homer as 'the exuberance of their celestial joy after their daily banquet.'" This, perhaps, hardly agrees with the popular idea of the term "Homeric laughter."

It may be that in the phrases of Darwin one sees a key to the difference between the laughter at witty dialogue and the laughter caused by comic situation, the former being an expression of intellectual amusement, not necessarily accompanied by "mere joy or happiness," whilst the latter is to a great extent the outcome of simple, non-intellectual human pleasure. In the case of a witty comedy one hears ripples of laughter rather than waves, and they have no cumulative effect, one may even laugh during a great part of the evening without reaching that agony of laughter which comes from an intensely funny situation—in fact, each laugh at dialogue is to some extent independent of the others. In the case of a funny situation there is a crescendo, and sometimes each outburst of laughter begins at the highest point reached by the outburst before it, till an intense pitch is attained; and, in fact, there is really no complete subsidence at all till the top of the climax is arrived at, but one is chuckling in between every spasm.

The term "screamingly funny" has a real meaning; one reaches an almost screaming pitch that leads to something like physical exhaustion, and certainly causes an aching of the sides, and even tears.

Another quotation from Darwin: "During excessive laughter the whole body is often thrown backwards and shakes, or is almost convulsed; the respiration is much disturbed; the head and face become gorged with blood, with the veins distorted; and the orbicular muscles are spasmodically contracted in order to protect the eyes. Tears are freely shed." On this one may refer to a phrase by Sir Joshua Reynolds: "It is curious to observe, and it is certainly true, that the extremes of contrary passions are, with very little variation, expressed by the same action." Yet another passage from Darwin: "With Europeans hardly anything excites laughter so easily as mimicry, and it is rather curious to find the same fact with the savages of Australia, who constitute one of the most distinct races in the world."

Probably the enjoyment of the spectator simply as an animal is higher, if in a sense lower, when it comes from situations than when it is due to dialogue. Of course there is no sharp line of demarcation. One understands, however, why successful farce is more popular than a successful comedy, even if afterwards the audience suffer a little from aching sides; the ache itself causes a pleasurable memory.

Some time ago there was a popular comic picture of the awakening of a young man who had been very drunk the night before, and was suffering from a headache and a black eye, and clearly had had some

exciting adventures, of which his memory was faint; the simple legend attached was, "What a ripping time I must have had last night!" One can imagine the playgoer after the farce, rare, alas! which honestly may be called side-splitting, saying to himself next morning, "What a ripping time I must have had last night!" and advising all his friends to go and see the play.

Smoking in the Auditorium

At last permission has been given, and the statement "You may smoke" can be printed on the programmes of the theatres licensed by the L.C.C.; and it is believed that the Lord Chamberlain is willing to follow suit. Some of our more important managers have already announced that they will not permit smoking in the auditorium of their playhouses, nor is this surprising. Some of us would sooner sacrifice our own smoke than get a headache from that of others; and the reason for the rareness of our attendance at music-halls is that we have to pay for every visit by a smarting of the eyes and a feeling in the head somewhat like that caused by the famous Sicilian torture.

What the ladies suffer goodness and they—the terms are perhaps synonymous—alone know. If and when the Suffragettes come into power, we shall have a prodigious counterblast to tobacco that would delight the Stuart James of unsainted memory or the now illustrious Balzac. For although the militant sex has many members who rejoice in a cigarette, the majority are bitterly adverse to an expensive habit, offensive to those who do not practise it, and exceedingly uncoquettish when indulged in seriously. Probably if the reign of My Lady Nicotine had never begun, and if no other enslaving habit of a like nature had taken a similar place, the theatres would be better off than at present. Permission to smoke will not deal with the difficulty; yet probably the habit of smoking keeps a very large number of people away from the theatre.

Without proposing to win any of the colossal prizes offered to people who guess the quantity of tobacco imported into this country in a particular month, one may venture to assert that there has been a tremendous increase in smoking during the last twenty years; and, indeed, we all know that the man who does not smoke is almost a curiosity nowadays.

The rules of offices, the customs of certain trades, the etiquette of some professions, and the like, prevent a great many men from having more than a trifling flirtation with tobacco till after dinner. The greedy smoker may get a pipe after breakfast, a whiff during lunch-time, and a pipe before dinner, which he takes distrustfully, because he has been told not to smoke on an empty stomach, but he looks to the hours after dinner for the debauch that turns his lungs from pink to brown. Moreover, there are many men who do not care to smoke till after dinner.

What a deprivation to all these to be hustled through a shortened dinner, to be scalded by coffee hastily drunk, and merely get a few puffs before they find themselves in a playhouse, where, by the way, so that insult may be added to injury, they often watch the actors smoking comfortably. A wise manager would not allow smoking *on* the stage except in very rare cases. The *entr'actes* amount to little; there is a rush of smokers, but many cannot leave their seats without giving offence to their companions, and some are too timid to fight their way from the centre of a row; and, after all, the *entr'acte* smoke, which takes place in a crowd so thick that you cannot tell the flavour of your own cigarette from that of other people, is rather irritating than satisfying. Of course there remains the period after the theatre, but it is comparatively brief for the man of whom we are speaking, since after the labours of the day and the fatigue of the evening he is tired enough to be rather anxious for sleep.

When the British householder is invited to take his womenfolk to the theatre, the thought that he will have to make such a sacrifice affects his judgment, a fact of which he is probably unaware. Very often it is the determining cause of refusal, and when he thinks consciously of it, of course he is not so foolish as to put it forward, but pleads this and that and indeed every other cause for keeping away. Many times have men said, "I don't care to go to the theatre unless there is something awfully good, because one is not allowed to smoke"; and the question may well be asked, What is offered to the man in place of his cigar or pipe? Shakespeare, unless severely adapted, and, in fact, treated as the book for a picturesque musico-dramatic performance, does not appeal very movingly to *l'homme moyen sensuel*, nor do the sentimental puppet stories which form the stock of our theatre fascinate him. A rousing farce will serve, but then the womenfolk do not want that. They are all for sentiment and dainty frocks which they may imitate—unsuccessfully—and for handsome heroes and love-making and other prettinesses which appeal to the daughters who live a kind of second-hand life in them, and to the mothers rendered for a while young by them, whilst paterfamilias looks on, uncomfortable in his seat, irritated very often by draughts which his *décolletée* dame does not notice—till afterwards—a little curious as to the cost of the whole affair, and after a while, in a state of semi-somnolence, thinking a good deal of the events of the day and the Alpine attitude of the Bank rate or the slump in Consols.

The poor dear man would be in a better humour if he were allowed his pipe. According to the French, the plain housewife looks charming to her husband when seen through the fumes of a good soup, and so too the plays of Mr — (perhaps it is wise to suppress the name) might appear entertaining to the British householder if a cloud of tobacco smoke were to intervene.

One of the victims made a suggestion the other day which may be worth consideration. "Why not," he said, "add to the theatre a comfortable kind of club-room, where a fellow might see the papers, and perhaps have a game of bridge, or even billiards, when the curtain was up, whilst he could keep his wife in good humour by paying her a call during the intervals?" There is something rather touching in the idea of a little crowd trooping in instead of bustling out when the curtain falls.

The innovation might at least have one advantage—it would force the managers to be intelligent enough to make a really audible noise a few minutes before the end of each *entr'acte*, so as to give people the chance of

settling down in their places before the curtain rises. Of the many incomprehensible things connected with the theatre one of the most puzzling is the fact that quite conscientious playgoers get caught outside the auditorium after the curtain is up. The management is anxious that as many people as possible should go to the bars, yet they render it very difficult to get there; they desire that those who have gone should return to their seats before the curtain rises, lest friction should be caused, but all they do as a rule is to ring some inaudible bell, and cause the attendant to whisper, as if delicately announcing bad news, "Curtain just going up, gentlemen," and neither curtain nor whisper gives long enough time to enable people to settle down comfortably.

It is to be feared that this sort of club idea would not really work, for reasons some of them quite obvious. The fact remains that paterfamilias, still a person of some importance, is invited to patronize the theatre, and not only asked to pay a good deal of money in order to do so but forced to make a number of physical sacrifices; and at the end is offered, as a rule, the kind of piece not intended to please him, but designed for the taste of his womenfolk.

Here we see one of the reasons for the popularity of the musical comedy. The householder is not required to trouble himself to understand a plot which hardly exists; he may go to sleep if he pleases, or think over his affairs in between the tit-bits without losing the thread; there are simple tunes, which certainly aid his digestion, and broad elementary humours that appeal to his sense of fun; and, if he is in a sentimental vein, whatever love-making there may be in the piece has no subtlety to exasperate him.

Despite these things, let us hope that the West End managers will be hostile to the smoking; for, after all, far too much of our drama at present is intended to please the comfortable Philistine and his appropriate womenfolk; and the people keenly interested in drama as a branch of art are prepared even to sacrifice a pipe or a cigar in the pursuit of their peculiar and hardly popular pleasure. Moreover, it is likely the theatres would exhibit the snobbishness of the fashionable halls and restaurants and taboo the pipe which every wise man prefers to the cigar or cigarette for serious smoking.

Conduct of the Audience

When Mr Joseph Holbrooke was conducting the overture to *Pierrot and Pierrette* at His Majesty's Theatre he interrupted the orchestra in order to request some members of the audience to stop talking. These speakers were people in the stalls, and the composer-conductor could hear that their conversation was about shopping—not Chopin, which, alas! is sometimes pronounced as if the name rhymed with "popping."

No one can feel surprised that a composer finds it impossible to do his work adequately as conductor when there is audible conversation among members of the audience. Mr Holbrooke drew attention to what happens very often in our playhouses: people come apparently entertaining the idea that if they have paid for their seats they owe no duty towards their neighbours or the author, composer or players. This idea, unfortunately, is not confined to those who have paid for their seats, since some of the dramatic critics, and also several of the ordinary "deadheads," set a bad example.

The most noisome offenders are those who come late on purpose, because they are anxious to draw public attention to their existence. They, of course, are snobs of the worst water, whatever their social status or the cost of their clothes, furs and jewellery; you see them bustling in a quarter of an hour after the curtain has risen, shoving their way along past people who rise reluctantly, and hear them chattering whilst they take off cloaks and wraps before settling down in their seats. Very little less detestable are those who, arriving late unwillingly, behave otherwise in the same fashion. One of these brawlers defended herself by alleging that there ought to be a gangway down the middle of the stalls, and that her conduct was a protest.

Of course there ought to be a gangway, and some day the County Council will insist upon the formation of one in every theatre, or else force the manager to put the rows of stalls so far apart that people can pass along them in comfort. We know that on the whole managers do not care much about the comfort of their patrons; they seem to act on the supposition that plays are of only two classes, those so attractive that you cannot keep the public away and those so unattractive that you cannot get it to come.

The London *théâtre de luxe* is still a dream of the future, though undoubtedly some playhouses are vastly more comfortable than others. The authorities are lax in this matter, as in the matter of exits; the crush in getting out of most of the playhouses is abominable. No doubt there are extra exits which might be used in case of peril; people ought to be compelled to use them every night, so that a habit would be established on the part of audiences and also of the attendants.

The patience with which the audience endures the misconduct of some of its members is surprising. We hear inarticulate noises of disapproval when people gossip in the stalls and occasionally somebody goes so far as to whisper "Don't talk"; the result is that the chatterers chatter rather more quietly for a little while, and soon are as noisy as before. Frequently some members laugh scornfully at pathetic passages moving the heart of most of the house, and this laughter is often due to a snobbish desire to show superiority to those who weep.

We have heard something lately of a phrase about "collective psychology and the psychology of crowds." The phenomenon referred to very rarely has much effect in the London playhouses at the first night: on these occasions there are too many discordant elements. Most of the critics form non-conductors to the passage of what has been regarded as analogous to an electrical current, and their non-conductivity is very little greater than that of many of the people who receive complimentary tickets or have the honour of being on the first-night list. Perhaps the general public is unaware that the more fashionable theatres have a list of people to whom is accorded a preferential allotment of seats.

Sometimes there is a momentary thrill; one feels distinctly that the audience is in unison, and that the pitch

of feeling of the individual is heightened by the feelings of the crowd. These moments are generally caused by pieces of acting or by what is rarely contrived, and can only happen once in the history of a piece, a successful, effective surprise. As an instance, there was a unanimous gasp of surprise and pleasure at the brilliant *coup de théâtre* with which John Oliver Hobbes ended a difficult scene in *The Ambassador*, and then came a prodigious outburst of applause. What a loss to our stage the premature death of that admirable novelist, who showed an amazing gift for the technique of the theatre.

One reads not unfrequently accounts of an exhibition of this "collective psychology" in the playhouse, even in the London theatres. Some of such accounts are untrustworthy, and due to mere hysterical writing by those who profess to record them. No doubt the curious shyness of the English plays its part: a man will laugh, or clap his hands, or hiss, or "boo" when others are so doing, who from mere *mauvaise honte*—a convenient untranslatable term—would make no noise if alone. Perhaps one might safely say that the smaller the crowd the smaller relatively as well as absolutely the noise due to the exhibition of the emotion of its component parts. This, however, has little to do with the phenomenon in question, which very rarely operates in London, because the upper classes think it ungentle to express emotion in public.

People read stories of scenes of "tremendous enthusiasm" on a first night, of Miss or Mrs A or Mr B receiving a dozen calls: as a rule they are absurdly exaggerated—they mean that the bulk of the pit and gallery have applauded heartily and persistently, and so, too, a small proportion of people in the upper boxes, dress circle, and stalls, the ratio steadily decreasing; that the employees of "the front of the house" energetically did their duty; in many cases that the unrecognized claque has earned its fee; that the curtain has been raised and lowered with frantic energy, and that a large number of people, after some preliminary clapping, regarded the scene with curiosity and amusement, their pulses beating at quite a normal pace.

Things may be different in other lands. Perhaps our ancestors were less "genteel," certainly there were fewer "non-conductors" in the houses; but still it is doubtful whether belief should be given to some of the old stories about tremendous exhibitions of emotion in the playhouse. One has to discount many of the triumphs of great singers because there is an element of desire for an "encore" in them. Moreover, music is beside the question, because its appeal is of a different character from that of drama.

These remarks may seem to have a grudging tone, to sound as if one desired to belittle the triumphs of the stage: in reality their object is simply to state what a careful observer regards as facts bearing upon an interesting, important question. Broadly speaking, it is doubtful whether in our theatres the phenomenon discussed under the name of "the psychology of crowds" is manifested to a substantial effect, except on very rare occasions, partly, no doubt, because a London audience is intensely heterogeneous—a wave of emotion in a West End playhouse has to surmount a large number of obstacles, losing force at each, or, to change the figure, a current of emotion has to pass through a great many bad conductors.

In respect only of laughter does the crowd exercise its power at all frequently, and then, as a rule, the subject-matter is not of the finest quality. Laughter certainly is infectious, curiously infectious, but it is more catching when caused by farce than by comedy. Few of us could deny that, as a member of the crowd, he has not sometimes laughed against his will and judgment at matters possessing a humble standard of humour. We are not grateful afterwards to the author or the low comedians—we suffer from an unpleasant loss of self-respect when we have been coerced by the crowd into laughing at mere buffooneries.

Concerning the Pit

Sometimes the ticket sent for a first night suggests a belief by the manager in the theory that the further one is from the stage the better one can see and hear—a theory which is accepted as accurate by none save the managers themselves. Possibly the seats in question are allotted in order to keep us at an agreeable distance from the orchestra, which in many theatres is altogether undesirable, or at least plays much music of an exasperating character. When such tickets come, and the seat is in the last row of the stalls, it is worth while to go to the theatre unpunctually before the appointed time.

By the way, it is noticeable that theatres are divisible into two classes—those at which the curtain is raised with a military severity at the very moment when the clock strikes, and others where a quarter of an hour's grace is given—to the players. In the case of French companies, old hands never hesitate about playing "another hundred up" before starting for the playhouse. A wise manager would be guided a little by the weather and always allow a few minutes' margin when it is foggy or rainy, for the audiences are necessarily delayed by such weather.

By getting to one's seat early, even before the time when the band is indulging in that part of its performance which is said to have been peculiarly agreeable to the Shah of Persia who visited London in the seventies, we enjoy certain humours.

Incidentally, it may be asked whether the ordinary playgoer exactly appreciates the position of the last rows of the stalls. Probably he believes that there is a gulf fixed between the stalls and the pit, and does not know that there is merely a barrier. Now a barrier can be removed easily—a gulf cannot. When paying his half-guinea the simple visitor imagines that the difference between the price of his seat and that of a place in the pit is to a great extent based upon an advantage of nearness—although it appears that some managers do not think that propinquity involves a gain.

As a matter of fact, a considerable portion of the floor of the house is occupied by stalls or pit, according to the nature of the business done in the theatre. If a piece is not attracting fashionable folk the barrier is moved towards the footlights, the chairs are changed to benches, and the place which at the *première* some deadhead proudly occupied as a stall takes a "back seat," and sinks to the indignity of becoming pit; and, of course, the converse sometimes happens.

It is amusing to hear the people on the other side discussing the entrance of the stall first-nighters, many of whom are identified. One hears comments upon the gowns, and sometimes severe remarks about the alleged misdeeds of the professional critics, as well as unflattering observations concerning the personal appearance of some of us. We might a tale unfold that would freeze a good many young bloods, but for a nice question of confidence.

The inhabitants of the pit really deserve a study. It may be said that they are sometimes more interesting than the play itself. There is a tradition that wisdom lies in the pit as Truth at the bottom of a well. Many articles have been written pointing out that the judgment of the pit is sounder than the opinion of other parts of the house, that the pitites are the real, serious, reflective, critical playgoers whose views are worth more than those of the playgoers either in the gallery or the most costly seats.

For a long time some of us believed in this tradition, probably, in fact, until circumstances caused us to move forward and study plays from the other side of the ambulatory barrier. One thing is certain—the pit plays a very great part in determining on a first night the apparent failure or success of a play, for on most occasions comparatively little noise is made by way of applause or condemnation save in the pit and gallery.

The stalls are remarkably frigid, though, on the other hand, they never, or hardly ever, show any active signs of disapproval. Somewhat false impressions are produced upon critics nearer to the footlights than the back seats. One of them the other day stated "the fall of the curtain was greeted with hearty and long-sustained applause from all parts of the house." Yet three of us noted—and compared notes—that after a little clapping, followed by one elevation of the curtain, the stalls did not contribute at all to the cheers. That evening there was a peculiarity in the pit's applause. It was "patchy." Here and there little groups were very noisy, and at the wings were some people from the "front of the house," quite enthusiastic about a performance of which they could have seen very little if they had attended to their duties, whilst there were noiseless areas of considerable size.

There is no need to suggest that the pit lacks judgment merely because it is composed very largely of those from whose mouths, according to the Psalmist, cometh forth wisdom; not, indeed, that in our West End houses there are present those very youthful playgoers who cause a disturbance by their audible refusal of the attendant's proposal of "ginger-beer, lemonade, bottled ale, or ... stout," being tired perhaps of the last-named beverage owing to the quantities they have taken—vicariously. Nevertheless, the pit on many first nights is wonderfully young; indeed, we calculated the other night that the average age of its temporary inhabitants was much less than half that of the distinguished company representing the play, and considerably less than that of the people whose late arrival caused murmurs and even words of disapproval.

It is natural for youth to be more enthusiastic than middle age, so one may easily explain the fact that the pit is more exuberant in demonstration than the stalls without the theory of the electrical effect of contact on crowds, a theory which every journalist at some stage of his career believes himself to be the first to have discovered.

Not only are they very youthful in the pit, but they have grace as well as youth. The other night in the front row there were only three members of the sex which does not know how to get out of a shop without making a purchase, and in the back rows, although the percentage of "angels" was not so high, it was quite noteworthy. Probably in all parts of the house, except at one or two theatres, there is a preponderance of women in the audience, and this may have some subtle connexion with the converse proportion of male and female characters in the cast; it may be observed that there is some change in the proportion of the sexes at theatres where there is no actor whose photographs sell prodigiously.

A sort of alteration seems quietly taking place in the costume of the pit, and not a few of the young ladies have come very close to a solution of a problem baffling to the Englishwomen belonging to what one may fairly regard as of somewhat higher stratum—the problem of inventing and wearing a demi-toilette.

It should be added that in some theatres the critics have good seats allotted to them. Indeed as a rule the courtesy shown to us is in something like direct ratio to the importance of the management.

Speaking for a moment seriously, one may say that whilst the ordinary first-night pit is full of enthusiasts, it would be rash to attach very great value to its manifestations of opinion concerning the value of really ambitious plays, though in respect of most pieces, and performances too, its judgment may be regarded as satisfactory, since it fairly represents those aimed at by authors and players. The higher class of comedy and the severely intellectual drama demand a more mature judgment.

Why do we go to the Theatre?

To ask why people go to the theatre seems silly; for the answer appears to be quite obvious; yet as soon as one answer is offered half-a-dozen others suggest themselves. Let us put down a few roughly: for entertainment, for amusement, for distraction, for instruction, to see the play or players in vogue, to be seen, to have something to talk about. Also there are cross-divisions and combinations of these; perhaps none of them is quite exclusive. Another question may be asked: Why do people stay away though able to go? How is it that some find insufficient pleasure in them?—for "pleasure" may be used as a term embracing the first four answers.

A cook, a Frenchwoman, once in the service of a dramatic critic, did not visit the theatre, and stated as her reason for not caring to do so that she took no interest in the affairs of other people; and secondly, that if she went and got moved by the troubles of the *dramatis personae* the thought suddenly occurred to her that they were not real persons and real troubles, and therefore she had wasted her sympathy, wherefore she was vexed, being an economical creature, so far as sympathy, not butter, is concerned. On the other hand, she admitted the payment of a number of visits to Pézon's circus, where they had a lion with a bad reputation,

into whose jaw at every performance a *décolletée* lady put her painted head. For the *cordons-bleus* hoped that the lion would exhibit disapproval of the paint and powder by chumping off the offending head, and that would have been frightfully thrilling.

Also she had a grievance because our executions are not public. She would like to see the murderers *gigoter un peu*; to her that would be a more sublime spectacle than the most prodigious effects at His Majesty's.

The papers lately contained accounts of the production at a music-hall of bioscope pictures of a horrible catastrophe in which many lives were lost, and stated that they were received with applause from the spectators, who derived much pleasure from looking at them. The French wielder of the *bouquet-garni*, in default of more bloodthirsty entertainment, would be delighted by them. It has often been remarked that an element of danger in a public performance is an element of attraction, and that the attraction is in proportion to the danger. These remarks are not entirely disconnected: they are relevant in considering the question why people go to the theatre.

For, with all respect to the establishments of the highest class, one must recognize the fact that there is a family relation between the noblest theatre and the humblest side-show at a country fair or East End museum. To be juster, the family relation is not between the things seen, but between the feelings which prompt people to pay money to see them.

It is often a mere toss-up whether X, Y or Z goes to a theatre or a music-hall, or a collection of "side shows" or a boxing-match; and the only solid wall of demarcation in pleasuredom lies between going to see something which pretends to be something else, and going to see something which admits itself to be its painful self. On the one hand, we have Smith posing as the Prince of Denmark; on the other the fat woman, whose unpleasant mass of unhealthy flesh is real—the lady giant hovers between reality and fiction. On the one side art, on the other artless entertainment; but, after all, it is difficult to say that this wall is very solid, since sometimes the artless department is abominably artful, and sometimes, as in the famous story of the mimic with a live pig in a poke, the real is an impostor.

The interest in the matter lies mainly with the audience, with the human beings greedy for pleasure and entertainment, with the traveller who, after a happy evening at the Comédie Française, endeavours to get taken to the abattoirs of Paris, or risks his life in a visit to the outer Boulevards in order to visit some pestilential Café de la Mort where he will see crude horrors contrived by looking-glasses, drink bad beer out of *papier-maché* skulls, and receive, in change for his money, base or demonetised coin from waiters dressed as undertakers. And, again, our traveller, after getting a headache at the Louvre and vainly trying to find the Mediaeval improprieties at the Maison Cluny, will refresh himself by a visit to the Morgue, to say nothing of Le Musée Grévin.

Why, then, do we go to the theatre? Why does the theatre exist? Why do the enthusiasts rage and profess that it ought to be endowed? Well, upon reflection, one sees that there are two bodies of playgoers, both, no doubt, in search of pleasure: and, speaking very broadly, the one is the little group whose curiosity concerning life is almost entirely intellectual, and the other is the vast body of sensation-hunters, to whom the latest showy play, the newest musical comedy, the divorce case of the moment, the freak in vogue, are the means of real excitement—an excitement which they want to obtain with the minimum expenditure of time, trouble or thought.

A remarkable thing to the observer is the hostility of the sensation-monger to intellectual amusement. If a play has a gloomy ending it is promptly denounced as painful by the people who welcome an entertainment consisting of biograph pictures representing some awful catastrophe, and by persons who revel in a good series of animated photographs of somebody being guillotined, or tortured in a Russian gaol, and do not care to waste their tears over the sorrows of people in a play, though perhaps a really roaring farce would entertain them, if it included a good deal of knockabout business. The uncivilized people who consider that practical joking is permissible are as a rule bitterly hostile to serious drama.

It is hard to discover any clear theory in relation to these facts. Attempts to establish a proposition are met by the fact that the sensation-monger who delights in the horrors of real life, who gets joy from a thrillingly dangerous performance at a music-hall, when he goes to the theatre sometimes seems pleased by a piece almost in a direct ratio to its unreality. A finely observed comedy, such as *The Silver Box* of Mr Galsworthy, irritates the sensation-monger; it is so absurdly true that he does not think it clever of the author to have written it. *Tom Jones* contains useful matter for thought on the subject. Something prodigious out of the lumber-room of the theatres impresses him far more. In England the explanation of this may be a strangely twisted feeling of utilitarianism, which causes us to object to thinking without being paid for thinking; wherefore it seems an act almost of impudence to ask us to pay money to see a play which cannot be understood or appreciated without serious thought.

CHAPTER XII

MISCELLANEOUS

Those mere casual playgoers who may think that the articles on drama in *The Westminster Gazette* have been needlessly pessimistic ought to read "The English Stage of To-Day," by Mario Borsa, translated by Mr Selwyn Brinton, and published by Mr John Lane; a lively, interesting book, in which are expressed vigorously the ideas of a very acute, intelligent writer upon our modern theatre. "Hence it is no wonder that all that is artificial, absurd, commonplace, spectacular, and puerile is rampant upon the English stage; that theatrical wares are standardized, like all other articles of trade...." "Still, in spite of all this booming and histriomania, one of the greatest intellectual privations from which the foreigner suffers in London is, I repeat, the lack of good comedy and good prose drama." Such sentences are specimens of his views about the current drama of London, and he endorses the sad phrase of Auguste Filon, "*Le drame Anglais, à peine né, se meurt.*"

In some respects the book is surprising. The author exhibits an intimacy of knowledge that appears almost impossible in one who, for a long time after his arrival in London, was "ignorant of the very language of the country." He has learnt our tongue well enough to give us some literary criticisms of value, notably upon the Irish theatre and the poetry of Mr W.B. Yeats, and he has made himself acquainted in a remarkable way with the plays of the last fifteen years or so, with the theatrical clubs and the various movements of revolt against our puppet theatre. There are slips, no doubt, such as the suggestion that the Independent Theatre introduced Ibsen to London, it being the fact that several of his plays had been presented before this Society was born.

Signor Borsa has something to say on most of the topics of the times. For instance, he deals with the Censor! "And here we touch the root of the evil—the Censor! It is the Censor who is the real enemy—the ruthless, insatiable Cerberus." He writes upon the question of speeches in the theatres. "In Italy a new play is sometimes so heartily hissed after one or two acts that the manager is forced to cut short the performance and proceed forthwith to the farce. This never happens in England, partly because every 'first night' is attended by a *claque*, judiciously posted and naturally well disposed. Not that these 'first-nighters' are paid to applaud, as in Paris or Vienna. Neither are they labelled as *claqueurs*. They are simply enthusiasts, and their name is Legion.... It is they who salute the actor-manager after the curtain has fallen with persistent demands of 'Speech! Speech!' And it is to the request of these good and faithful friends that he accedes at last, in a voice broken by emotion, due to their spontaneous and generous reception."

Of late some people have been suggesting gleefully that the vogue of "G.B.S." is on the wane. His popularity has been the cause of great annoyance to the mass of the public and those critics who stand up for a theatre of "old scenic tricks which were long familiar to me—sensational intrigues, impossible situations, men and women who could have been neither English nor French nor Italian." They will be glad to learn that Signor Borsa says: "Shaw's dramatic work is pure journalism, destined to enjoy a certain vogue, and then to be swallowed up in the deep pit of oblivion. Nor should I be surprised if this vogue of his were already on the decline.... Shaw, with all his wit and all his go, already shows signs of becoming terribly monotonous." According to him, in "Shaw there were the makings of a writer of talent."

Let us add that no evidence exists to show the decline of the author's popularity; it may also be said that much of "G.B.S." is quite incomprehensible to a foreigner. What Signor Borsa calls the "restaurateurs-proprietors," and also the actor-managers—with a few exceptions—may hold aloof, but Mr Shaw has brought to the theatres a new public, and taken a good many of the old as well. Apparently Signor Borsa's hostility to "G.B.S." is founded on the fact that the dramatist is a revolutionary and refuses to accept the theatrical formulae which satisfy the Italian. One must, however, point out that whilst Signor Borsa's general conclusions concerning the most remarkable person of the English theatre are unsound, his remarks in detail are acute and luminous, and some of them well deserve the consideration of the victim.

The curiosity of the book is the treatment of the acting. According to Signor Borsa, "the acting has little to boast of. A century, or even half-a-century, ago the case was different. But the glories of Kean, Macready, Kemble, and Siddons now belong to history and but yesterday Sir Henry Irving stood alone—the unique representative in England of the great tragic art.... In conveying irony, the English actor is in his element; in comic parts, he is simply grotesque. The buffoon may occasionally be found upon the English stage—the brilliant comedian never. In tragic parts he easily assumes an exaggerated gravity and solemnity; in sentimental rôles he is frankly ridiculous."

Frankly is a mistranslation, or else the adjective is ridiculous, if not "frankly" ridiculous. Signor Borsa falls into a very common error. He thinks that because English actors do not gesticulate a great deal they act badly. This might be true if they represented on the stage a gesticulative race. The author points out carefully that we are not a gesticulative race, and fails to see that it would be bad acting for the player to represent an Englishman as being naturally gesticulative. The English Jew is more gesticulative than the ordinary Englishman; the Anglo-Jewish players—and there are many—curb themselves when they are playing British characters, and of course they act artistically in so doing.

The function of the actor is to impress the audience before him, nine-tenths of which consist of people who would regard him as ridiculous and unnatural if, when acting an ordinary English part, he were to gesticulate very much. We have seen Italian players of ability representing English characters, and, putting aside Duse, the obvious and correct criticism was that they were very funny and quite incorrect in their exuberance of gesture.

Irving is the only actor whom he discusses; Ellen Terry the one English actress. This, of course, is absurd. It indicates, however, very usefully the attitude of the foreign critic towards our stage. Also, perhaps, it is a little chastening to our players. The foreigner is able to understand and appreciate to some extent the best of our plays; the acting says nothing to him, or at least nothing flattering. Our comedians are "buffoons," our lovers are "frankly ridiculous," and the Italian actors are superior in "temperament"—whatever that may mean. Ours, it appears, are better than the Italians in some humble ways: "They dress their parts better and wear their clothes better," and they even know their parts—a vulgar quality which apparently is rare on the

Italian stage—also they are more cultured, and "possess to a greater degree the dramatic literary sense."

One may accept, sadly, Signor Borsa's view, which is shared by most Continental and many British critics, that the ordinary English drama is utterly unworthy of the English people; but we certainly have abundance of competent players, and a fair number of dramatists anxious and able to give the public far better drama than they get, as soon as managers are willing to produce it; the great trouble is that the managers are afraid of the public, and although they might wisely be more venturesome, they have, in the present mass of playgoers, a terrible public to cater for. The facts and figures offered by Signor Borsa show too eloquently that the managers attempt to deal with the difficulty by a very short-sighted policy. Still, the position is less desperate than the Italian critic supposes, and much of what has happened since Auguste Filon wrote the line already quoted shows that he was too hasty in his judgment.

"G.B.S." and the Amateurs

There is a story—its untruth is indisputable—to the effect that on a death of a man of unconventional character his mournful family, after much trouble, hit upon the happy thought of satisfying their desire to leave an amiable and incontestable record concerning him by having inscribed upon his tombstone the following epitaph:—"He never acted in private theatricals."

A touch of acrimony seems discernible in certain utterances of Mr George Bernard Shaw about amateur theatricals which makes one doubt whether such a statement in his case would contain even the trifling percentage of truth that is customary in epitaphs. Indeed, he causes an impression that he has really done something worse than play in amateur theatricals, and even, although an amateur, has appeared in a professional performance. There has been a rather needless fury in his remarks; it is a case doubtless of more sound than sentiment. This, however, is pretty George's way; where some would use a whip he "fillips" people with "a three-man beetle."

They say that all the amateur Thespians' clubs in the kingdom have passed fierce resolutions about him, and a monster petition is being prepared praying for his outlawry or excommunication. The cause was a letter concerning the question whether dramatists ought to reduce their fees for performance by amateur clubs of copyright works, and the trump card of the opponents was the fact that many of the entertainments are given for the benefit of charities. Mr Zangwill it was who observed that "charity uncovers a multitude of shins"; perhaps one may add, clumsily, that charity suffereth long and applauds.

Certainly, amateur performances rarely contain anything intentionally so humorous as the idea of suggesting to "G.B.S." that he should reduce his fees by way of an indirect contribution to the fund for the restoration of some village church or the like. Apparently the common answer to the author of *Mrs Warren's Profession* is a sort of paraphrase of the line "Nobody ax't you, sir, she said."

It would be interesting to know how many performances, if any, have been given by the great unpaid of pieces by the now successful theatrical iconoclast. Who knows whether his wrath has not a touch of the *spretæ injuria formæ*? Perhaps he is longing to have *Caesar and Cleopatra* represented by some amiable association that has hitherto confined itself to the comedies of Bulwer Lytton and farces by Maddison Morton. It may be the dream of his life to see what people untrammelled by considerations of filthy lucre, except so far as the benefit of the charity is concerned, can make of *The Philanderers*.

Judging by the public press and the circulars, Mr Shaw is not inaccurate in his view that the army of amateurs does comparatively little service for drama. Its taste seems to be for showy, artificial plays, and its tendency to seek out works that do not act themselves because of their truth of characterisation but afford unlimited scope for originality on the part of performers—generally half-baked performers.

This does not apply to all amateur societies; at least we know that there are a number of associations not for the purposes of gain, such as the Elizabethan Stage Society, now, alas! dead, which showed a very stern enthusiasm for the higher forms of art. They appear to be the exception. There was a time when it was difficult to find a man in the street who had not acted in *Ici on Parle Français* or played in *Money* or appeared in *Our Boys*, and nowadays it seems that though there has been some progress, the austere drama is still unpopular, and that when funds are sufficient artificial costume plays are in vogue.

Mr Shaw apparently believes that vanity is the fundamental motive of amateur performances. It may be that this is not wholly true, and that the real impulse is the elementary instinct for dressing-up. Savages, we know, have a craving for strange costumes which enable them to disguise and even disfigure their persons. Children delight in dressing up. Possibly one of the great joys of the amateur lies in the fact that he has an opportunity of wearing clothes pertinent to somebody else, and, if he be a male, is curious to see how he looks and is looked upon with the whiskers of the mid-Victorian beau or the imperial of the Third Empire, and so on.

The amiable philosopher would find a pleasanter explanation, would suggest that the desire to "dress up" is based upon a modest doubt concerning the charms of one's own individuality—how agreeable to believe this! At the bottom of the matter lies this ugly contention on the part of the cynic—he alleges that the amateur wants to act not for the benefit of the charity, the name of which is invoked hypocritically, but for the gratification of his vanity, and the authors are unable to see why the clubs should gratify the conceit of their members at the expense of those who write the plays.

After all, the matter is one of domestic economy, and the wisest thing seems to be to leave people to make their own bargains; and if the result is that the best plays are the dearest and the least performed, the result may be somewhat advantageous. It is always uncertain whether the individual spectator who has witnessed an amateur performance of a piece will be anxious to see how it really acts or determine never to suffer from it again. Perhaps it is rather cheap to scoff at the amateur performances, some of which, no doubt, are

excellent.

Moreover, it cannot be doubted that in a good many cases the amateur stage provides recruits for *the* profession, and some of our most popular players—like Mr Shrubbs and other famous runners—have begun their careers by merely striving for "the fun of the thing." Probably many who now stroll the Strand or haunt "Poverty Corner" fruitlessly, were induced to embark upon their vain career by the polite plaudits of amiable friends whose judgments were worthless even when honest. Perhaps some of them, or of their friends, begin to believe that Mr Zangwill was not quite untruthful in his phrase that "players are only men and women—spoilt," which, of course, he did not intend to be of universal application.

Still, it can hardly be denied that "G.B.S." was needlessly severe. The amateur actors do very little harm and cause a great deal of innocent amusement which outweighs the harm. It may be that, except in dealing with serious plays, there is an unfair proportion of amusement on the farther side of the footlights, but it must be recollected that the performers have many trials and annoyances, and often make severe sacrifices—of friendships.

If the authors of established reputation seem too greedy the clubs have an easy remedy. At the present moment the cry of the unacted is unusually bitter and loud. Why, then, should not these associations, able as some are to give performances that are at least adequate if not exactly brilliant, save as regards a few individual players, assist the drama by giving a chance to the unacted of seeing their works on the stage? In many cases plays now rejected by managers because they have an instinctive feeling that there is some flaw which defies precise indication might, after such a production, be corrected and rendered acceptable and valuable.

Cant about Shakespeare

In a criticism upon the new Lyceum revival of *Hamlet* there was a sentence which impressed me greatly. It appeared in a morning paper of prodigious circulation, and was in these words: "Mr Matheson Lang's *Hamlet* ... is what may be called a popular one, and likely to be extremely popular. And this is well, for 'tis better to see Shakespeare in any form than not to see him at all, so that these performances deserve every support, being in some ways not unlike the productions ... which serve to keep alive the classics and old traditions of art." This criticism, or rather statement, is popular—"extremely popular." People seem to think that there is virtue in producing Shakespeare and in acting Shakespeare and in reading Shakespeare. It would be pleasant to feel confident that there is virtue in writing about him—I have written so much—but probably nobody takes this extreme view. Now, some have a different opinion.

A strenuous dramatist, namesake of a contemporary of the national dramatist, ventures to call the "Swan of Avon" a "blackleg" instead of a black swan, and ascribes his popularity with managers to the fact that his name no longer spells bankruptcy, and that no royalties have to be paid on performances of his plays, in consequence of which they are often, or sometimes, produced where, otherwise, modern works would be presented.

It is not necessary to go so far as this to reach a sane view on the subject—a view which probably lies between the extremes. Certainly we may well wonder whether and why it is a good thing to produce Shakespeare plays unless the production is of fine quality. Everybody is acquainted with Lamb's essay, with what one may call "Elia's" paradox, on Shakespeare, the vigorous truth of which is partly counterbalanced by the fact that few play readers have anything like his powers of imagination, and that he probably underrated the knowledge of Shakespeare possessed by playgoers, or at least by West End first-nighters.

Indeed, one may go further and say that during any run of a Shakespearean play it will be visited by some thousands of people well acquainted with it and some hundreds who immediately detect any alteration of the text. The enjoyment of these expert or semi-expert playgoers of a performance of a Shakespeare play, when compared with their pleasure in reading it, is probably much higher than Lamb imagined. It is, however, hardly for them that these dramas are revived, and clearly for quite a different audience that the Lyceum production is given.

Is it a really good thing that *Hamlet* should be offered to those who have little or no acquaintance with the tragedy? A study of the audience on the first night of *Hamlet* at the Lyceum gave the idea that the majority were far from appreciating the work, and did not, at any rate, get a greater or different pleasure from it than they would have had if instead of the Shakespearean dialogue they had been offered the blank verse of any ordinary respectable writer.

Why should it be otherwise? Why should the hundreds of people in the sixpenny gallery understand the conduct of Hamlet, which has puzzled the most learned and acute critics of all countries for centuries? A person hearing the play on the stage, and otherwise unacquainted with it, must be bewildered. How is he to understand why Hamlet is so rude to Ophelia, yet later on declares that he loved her prodigiously? What is he to think of a Hamlet who takes so much trouble to find out whether his uncle is guilty, and then tamely submits to be sent out of the country by him, leaving his father unavenged? What opinion is he to form of the perfectly idiotic, complex conspiracy between the King and Laertes to get rid of Hamlet? Why should *Hamlet* appeal to him, except as a melodrama with a flabby hero, a feeble heroine, a very small amount of comic relief, and far too much dialogue, much of which is almost unintelligible? What can he make of the great soliloquies, of the purple patches, written in involved sentences, embellished by curious archaic terms of speech, elaborate figures, and puzzling inversions, which at the best can only give him a vague idea of what is supposed to be said?

If you were to send a highly educated man, ignorant of the play—perhaps an apparent contradiction—he would at first be bored or irritated. No doubt his ear might catch and his mind retain some profound phrases, and he would promptly recognize the grandeur of the verse in many passages, so that his curiosity would be

awakened, and cause him either to read the play or see it time after time. What about the man in the street, the railway guard, the 'bus conductor, the "shover," the humbler clerks, and their womenfolk, who are patrons of the gallery; will they get beyond one visit? Can they recognize profound thoughts at first hearing, or at all? Are they able to distinguish beautiful blank verse from bombast? Are the soliloquies of Hamlet likely to lure them to the severe intellectual task of reading the play scrupulously?

Of course these questions do not concern members of the "Gallery First-Nighters" Club. They may or may not patronize the sixpenny gallery or shilling pit of the Lyceum. No doubt the members of the club are fully competent to appreciate the play, but they certainly formed the minority last Saturday week, and will be rare during the later performances. It was not they who laughed in the wrong places, or laughed with the wrong laughter, or coughed, during the uneventful scenes.

It will be said that thousands have gone and will go to this revival and enjoy it, and, therefore, these views must be wrong. These remarks are not in disparagement at all of this particular revival. It is, however, certain that the pleasure of the majority of those who visit this revival would be none the less if the work had been written by a second-rate playwright; indeed, Mr Cecil Raleigh who, compared with Shakespeare, may, perhaps, be called second-rate, could write them a new *Hamlet* on the old plot which would give them far greater pleasure than they get at present.

Critics ought to speak with perfect sincerity about the drama; great harm is done by people who, with excellent motives, write insincerely. The average schoolboy is prevented from enjoying the classics by being bored with them when he is too young to understand them. The average man never reads the Bible for pleasure, because he has been brought up to regard it as a kind of religious medicine; and it is unlikely that the great half-educated will be brought to a taste for Shakespeare by a stage performance of his works. This is no plea against the performance of his plays, but against writing carelessly and conventionally about them. Nobody will deny Lamb's love of the dramatist. He would say that if Shakespeare is to be played to the masses there should be some preliminary training of them. At least they might be broken in gently. To present *Hamlet* as successor to the pantomime and not long after some of the simple melodramas acted at this theatre seems rather irrational.

A better service is done to the public and to drama by presenting modern English plays, written sincerely and on a reasonably high standard of truth, than by reviving works that can only appeal to most of the half-educated despite, and not because of, their finer qualities. Shakespeare, indeed, might ask the gallery in the phrase of Benedick, "For which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?" The important matter is to get rid of humbug, to try to see things truly. Drama is worthy of serious consideration as a great branch of art and a great force, but will never fulfil its mission if it is to lie in a mortmain to dead dramatists, and if it is to be regarded as more meritorious to try to make money by producing the non-copyright dramas of the past than by presenting the works of living men who need a royalty.

This is not a plea against revivals of the English classics, the production of which under certain circumstances may be praiseworthy and valuable, but against such propositions as "'tis better to see Shakespeare in any form than not at all," which cause people to form false judgments and push them to enterprises of little value.

Yvette Guilbert on Dramatists

Lately Yvette Guilbert has been making some strange remarks concerning drama and dramatists. Her words demand attention since they come from the lips of a woman of genius. In our time the domain between the theatre and the concert-room has produced no artist of her rank. One recollects her different styles. First, in the amazing delivery of almost frankly indecent songs—a delivery so extraordinarily fine as to convert them for the moment into works of art—the image of beautiful iridescent scum on foul water suggests itself. Secondly, in the presentation by short song and very sober gesture and facial expression of grim tragedies, a presentation more vivid and poignant than the ordinary theatre can give, despite its numerous aids to art. Then came the charming utterance of quaint old songs—who can forget Béranger's "La Grandmère" as it came from her?

Paris, insatiable in craving for novelty, is said to have grown tired of her, but her place as the greatest of singers in the variety theatres cannot be gainsaid. It is alleged that she intends to go upon the stage, and imaginable that her search for suitable plays has caused her outburst against playwrights. Whether she will be successful as actress or not is a question of interest concerning which *a priori* reasoning is futile. Certainly she must be a difficult person for whom to write a play.

Apparently she has gone to some fashionable dramatist and given him a commission to write a drama as a vehicle for the exhibition of her histrionic gifts, and is dissatisfied by the result. One is justified in making the guess by her theories concerning the future of drama when the "arenas" are again opened, and "histrionic" art is rejuvenated. "Let the actors enter," she says, "with their ideas boiling over, their nerves strung to the highest pitch, and let the public suggest to each the action or character to be mimicked. Let a dozen different ideals be impersonated, then real, true and original talent will be revealed, new ideas will be discovered which will no longer be guided by the author and stage manager and theatrical director, but which will be free, untrammelled, and no longer ready-made emotions."

This sounds rather daring, and the lady, before kicking the dramatists out of the theatre, might consider carefully what is to become of the players who have not sufficient brains in their skulls for there to be any "boiling over." Some actors, no doubt, are intellectual men, but not a few of the best possess no ideas of their own. This quotation and others that follow come from a translation which appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* of a letter written by Yvette Guilbert to *The Figaro*.

It is noteworthy that this idea of dispensing with dramatists is not new. Efforts were made in the days of *Le*

Chat Noir to evolve a new kind of drama, in which the playwright had little concern. Moreover, Mr Gordon Craig, one of the forces of the future—and of the present—has revolutionary ideas on the subject.

Let us now see what the great *diseuse* thinks of dramas and dramatists. Here is a strong sentence by her: "The author ignores, or will not admit, that, despite all his efforts, he never produces anything but a half-dead child. The talented actor animates, nurses, consolidates, fortifies and clothes it, suggests the proper gestures and attitudes, infuses his own health and strength into this weakling, gives it blood and, so to speak, makes it live. The playwright contributes the soul, it is true; but, the soul being intangible, it is only a pitiable gift so far as the dramatic art is concerned."

To anticipate an obvious objection she says, "Of course I know there were a Shakespeare, a Racine, a Molière, and some others.... What a pity they had no descendants!" It is permissible to wonder whether the lady has read much drama. Possibly she would ask why she should spend time in reading mere "souls," and admit that her acquaintance with plays is almost confined to works witnessed by her; and, indeed, seeing that, according to her, "the *rôle* of the comedian is superior to that of the author," she may believe that a play only exists when it is acted, and be quite unaware that an imaginative, intelligent person can get a high degree of pleasure from reading a play.

The dramatist may well rest content with the suggestion that his work is the soul, the immortal, noble part of drama, and that the players form only the gross, corporeal element.

There may be some truth in Guilbert's remarks: "The dramatic is the most inferior of all arts. The play passes through too many channels, and comes before the public as a cramped, crushed and faded form. The writer ... sees his play in one light, the theatrical manager receives it and sees it in another, the stage-manager adds his own way of understanding it, the actor takes it up according to his own temperament and talents, and the public sees it from a fifth point of view. Add to this ten or twelve subsidiary characters. How can an author claim, under such circumstances, to remain the absolute master of his work?"

The term "subsidiary characters" to some extent explains the attitude of the actress. It is a suggestion of the famous "*moi-même et quelques poupées*" which exhibits the clash of ideas that forms the basis of the ineradicable antagonism between the original author and the actor. Each naturally thinks himself the master.

To the true dramatist the players are as the colours on the palette, the instruments in the orchestra—or, perhaps, the players of them—the stone of the sculptor; their task is to give bodily form to his ideas, clothes and flesh to the "soul" of his drama, and, as far as possible, to efface themselves in doing their duty.

The player, on the other hand, regards the dramatist as someone intended to write splendid parts for him—parts in which, to use the stock phrase, he "sees himself"—sees *himself*. Unfortunately the dramatists have, on the whole, been the sufferers, the slaves.

Sardou enslaved himself to Bernhardt; there are grounds for thinking that but for this slavery he might have been a great dramatist and not merely a rich, supremely skilful play fabricator. For a long time the players have had the upper hand, mainly because of the servility of the dramatists, but there are signs of a change. Already the "ten or twelve subsidiary actors" phrase is becoming out of date. We have seen play after play at the Court with parts of different degrees of importance, but hardly any "subsidiary" characters in the sense in which Yvette Guilbert uses the term.

There are moments when the letter of Guilbert seems a joke or a hoax. One does not like to think that she said, "The true comedian finds his success in himself, and can do without the dramatic author. He easily utilizes his own comic or tragic gifts, as is witnessed in Shakespeare, Molière, and a hundred others." To think that we do not know whether Shakespeare was "a true comedian," and that it is not unlikely that he was a poor actor! The lady is wise not to attempt to name the "hundred others" presumably *ejusdem generis* with Shakespeare and Molière. "There have always been, since the beginning of the ages, mimics and improvisators who did without the text of others." Possibly this is true but it does not follow that there are many players who could hold an audience by their mimicry or improvisations; not a few of the greatest actors and actresses might starve if they had to rely upon their own ideas. It is even notorious that some of our most illustrious actors have had their brilliant after-dinner impromptu speeches written for them.

After reading the whole letter one may hint that Guilbert's own ideas might not serve her very well if she tried to appear as improvisator.

CHAPTER XIII

MISCELLANEOUS

Finance in Plays

It is to be hoped that the title will not be misunderstood. The finance *of* plays is quite another story, often an ugly story, sometimes with a comic aspect, and frequently disclosed in a bankruptcy or a winding-up. Occasionally in pieces supposed to be quite modern we are told, incorrectly, a good deal about the way in which plays are financed, which does not mean the mode of spending money on the production and

performance of dramas and in keeping theatres open—or closed—but the method of raising money for theatrical enterprises. Certainly, the subject is worthy of consideration, and some day we hope to handle it almost adequately. The remarks, however, concern the ideas of general finance exhibited by authors. Mr Sutro's drama *The Perfect Lover* set us thinking. No doubt the title does not suggest money, nor, indeed, does it give an idea of the real subject of the drama. In his new work the author preaches a sermon about the corrupting influence of wealth and the desire for it. As business men, in a sort of second-hand way, most of us were interested in the talk concerning money.

Everything turns upon the fact that Willie, the wicked solicitor, wishes to buy the Cardew estates, which (though the property of a noble family) happen to be unsettled, because he has discovered that there is coal under them, and therefore scents a fortune in the purchase. The moment that the word "coal" is mentioned to the persons in the play everything is understood—by them. All assume that the property is multiplied in value by its existence. Joe is to be offered £5000 to bring about the sale. A simple practical person, such as a dramatic critic, is inclined to ask whether Willie is not buying a pig in a poke. He can hardly have had shafts sunk surreptitiously on the Cardew estates in order to ascertain whether the coal-mines would be a curse or a blessing to the owner; and if the property adjoined valuable collieries, the Cardews would have made some investigation.

For it by no means follows that a coal-mine is a source of wealth, since the "black diamonds," concerning our available quantity of which Professor Jevons scared our fathers when some of us were agreeably younger, may be indifferent in quality or lie with such faults and in a manner so inconvenient that it can only be worked at a ruinous cost. Nevertheless, whenever the magic word "coal" is whispered the characters are thrilled, like housewives reminded by their husband that they have forgotten to order it at the "lowest summer prices." No doubt the author will say that after all coal is coal, and may be reminded of the plaintive retort by the little girl in *Punch* that "mother said the last lot was nearly all slates." Willie talks of making a million out of the purchase; he is fortified in his views by the fact that the Great Central Railway is going to run through part of the property. Writers of fiction are apt to believe that in these times land-owners receive on compulsory purchase the extravagant sums that used to be awarded in past days and by their magnitude have hampered the railway companies and the general public ever since; juries or arbitrators have come to their senses, and compensation no longer spells unmerited fortune, except by the reaping of a large crop of "unearned increment." And now there are the new taxes.

It may be suggested that we do not demand exact finance or correct law in our fiction nowadays. A few, indeed, are meticulous in the matter, but it is generally assumed that the public would be bored by correct details. No one has ventured to dramatize Laurence Oliphant's brilliantly humorous "Autobiography of a Joint Stock Company"—apologies if by slip of memory the title is given at all incorrectly. Occasionally, it is true, our plays treat financial matters with some particularity; one may cite *Mammon* and *A Bunch of Violets*, both versions of Feuillet's drama *Montjoie*, and Mr Arthur Jones's clever piece *A Rogue's Comedy*, and *Business is Business*, the adaptation of *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*. Moreover, there was a melodrama given at the Opéra Comique which, despite the care of the Censor, contained caricatures of several notorious living financiers. They were financiers touching whom one may record the story, perhaps unpublished, of an American who asserted vaingloriously that we have no great financiers in England such as are to be found in the United States, and on being answered that we have, and thereupon inquiring scornfully where they could be found, received the curt reply, "In gaol." Unfortunately, the finances of the Opéra Comique production were almost as unsubstantial as the finance in the other plays, and it did not last long.

Mr Cecil Raleigh also, in some of the Drury Lane dramas which used to give us vast entertainment, handled company matters in a broad, generous, comic fashion which baffled criticism.

Would a public so abominably engrossed as ours in money, a people that is exchanging the ascendancy of an aristocracy for the despotism of a plutocracy, a nation a large proportion of which gambles on the Stock Exchange whilst another plays bridge for shocking stakes, really reject a drama turning on financial matters and containing a moderate amount of accurate detail? If there is little poetry in Throgmorton Street, at least there is plenty of romance, and more imagination is exhibited in the average prospectus than in the ordinary play. It would not be impossible to introduce a touch of sentiment, assuming, sadly, that the playgoers cannot be happy without a little bit of sugar; whilst the fierce clash of men in the mad pursuit for wealth—a pursuit, after all, more engrossing than that of love—is often terribly dramatic. There was a piece called *The Wheat King*, an adaptation of one of the few books by the powerful American novelist Norris, who died too young. The version, made by two ladies, very nearly fulfilled the conditions suggested, and it almost achieved success.

Doubtless everybody connected with theatres believes that love in some form or another is the only possible basis for a successful drama, although we are well aware that romantic love such as the dramatists trade in is only an episode in the lives of a minority of the nation, and does not come at all to the rest. Apparently it is presumed that those who have never felt it wish to hear about it, and that those who have, desire to revive their memories. Indeed, many experts imagine there are very few topics which will lure the public to the box-office.

There is before us at the moment a letter from Henry Irving, in answer to a suggestion that Ibsen's great drama *The Pretenders* was worthy of production by him, and he says, "Of the power of Ibsen's *Pretenders* I am quite sensible, but unfortunately there are considerations which prevent me from accepting the suggestion. In the first place, I believe the theme of ambition has no great dramatic hold, or a very slender one, on the playgoing public of to-day.... I am compelled as a manager to take these things into account. Were I conducting an endowed theatre, the case would be different." Many things have happened in Stageland since April 1897, when this letter was written by Irving, and it is by no means improbable that the scope of the theatre has been somewhat extended. After all, it is fantastic that money, the element which plays the greatest part in the lives of most of us, should generally be treated superficially if at all, and, as a rule, when

not neglected, should be handled without accuracy or even verisimilitude of detail.

One might refer to *Macbeth* as a successful play with ambition as its theme. Since Irving's letter was written a fair number of unsentimental plays have been produced and well received, such, for instance, as *Strife* and *The Silver Box* and *The Voyage Inheritance*, all works of great quality.

Some Unsuccessful Dramatists

When considering some of the criticisms upon *Becket*, and accepting them as accurate, one is inclined to ask why Tennyson failed as a dramatist. That he did, judged by the ordinary standard, can hardly be denied, nor could any degree of success with *Becket* disprove the statement, since the acted work is a bold, free adaptation of the printed play. He was anxious for success as a playwright, and in fact no fewer than five of his plays have been presented on the stage—all of them published after he was sixty-six years old. Now, Tennyson, undoubtedly, from every point of view that one can classify exactly, was far better equipped for playwriting than hundreds of successful dramatists—yet he failed. Why?

The puzzle does not end nor begin with him. One can name a number of literary men of great rank who have written vainly for the stage, to say nothing of others who are authors of works in the form of drama, but nevertheless, like a Shelley, Swinburne or Longfellow, may not have been stagestruck.

As conspicuous modern instances Balzac, Byron and Browning may be selected, and a writer who, if hardly of the same class, has written at least one masterpiece. This is Charles Reade, whose delightful book "The Cloister and the Hearth" seems likely to attain immortality. Reade, we know, was absolutely stagestruck, and wrote dozens of plays and spent a great deal of money over them; indeed, it is not too much to say that his mania for the theatre seriously injured his work as a novelist. Yet who will pretend that any of the pieces that he concocted alone or in conjunction with others is worth the least valuable of his novels?

Balzac, though not stagestruck in the same degree as Charles Reade, had a great desire for success as a playwright; part of the desire may have been due to eagerness to make money with which to pay off those terrible debts. Yet in one biography of him no mention is made of his dramas. Nevertheless, he sweated hard over *Vautrin*, *La Marâtre*, *Les Ressources de Quinola* and *Mercadet*; none of them helped substantially to pay off the debts, nor can any be rated equally with the poorest of his novels. *Mercadet*, certainly, has one brilliant scene of comedy in it, and under the name of *A Game of Speculation* proved a trump-card with Charles Mathews. G.H. Lewes was author of the version which, according to a popular story, was written and rehearsed between Saturday and Monday. The original, with the full title of *Mercadet ou Le Faiseur* was not acted till after the death of Balzac, when it was reduced to three acts by D'Ennery and given with success at Le Gymnase.

Everybody knows that Browning wrote a number of plays. *A Soul's Tragedy* was lately presented by the Stage Society, an interesting hardly successful experiment. *A Blot on the Scutcheon* was produced at Drury Lane in 1842 and revived by Phelps at Sadler's Wells, and also in 1893 by the Independent Theatre, when Miss May Harvey gave an admirable performance as Mildred; whilst *Strafford*, *Colombe's Birthday* and *In a Balcony* have all seen the footlights and achieved at the most a *succès d'estime*. Few, however, even putting aside the vulgar, fallacious test of the box-office, would say that these works are really valuable stage dramas, despite the superb qualities obvious in them.

Some of Lord Byron's plays have been given upon the boards; but the real Byron of the stage is the author of *Our Boys* and goodness knows how many more successful works, all as dead to-day as the dramas of Sheridan Knowles. It has been said that *The Cenci*, when produced privately by Sir Percy Bysshe Shelley, with Miss Alma Murray as heroine, acted very well. Has the Stage Society ever considered the question of a revival?

How, then, did it happen that Balzac, Byron, Browning and Reade failed as dramatists, despite the eager desire of three of them, at least, to win success on the boards? It is undeniable that the three—one may put aside Byron—are intensely "dramatic" writers. *Les Chouans* reads almost as if it were a play converted into a novel, and has been adapted successfully, and like *Le Père Goriot*, which someone has called the French *King Lear*, has been used for the stage after the time when the long-desired marriage with Madame Hanska was ended by the premature death of the author of the fine phrase, "*Vierges de corps nous étions hardis en paroles*." Indeed, in half the works composing the prodigious *Comédie Humaine* are passages of immense dramatic force. Clearly, too, the author of "The Cloister and the Hearth" could paint character and was a splendid storyteller into the bargain. It would be impossible to say this without certain qualifications in the case of Browning; yet who that has been fascinated by that colossal work "The Ring and the Book" can deny it? Why, then, should Balzac and Browning have failed where Shakespeare and Sardou have succeeded?

The question brings forward another, and it is this: whether Shakespeare, if he were writing nowadays, would be a successful dramatist. At first sight it seems an absurd question, but it is permissible because one must recognize the fact that what perhaps prevented Balzac and Browning from being successful has not proved an impediment to the triumph of Shakespeare. The dramas of our national dramatist are the most heavily thought-burdened plays that have had popular success in modern times, and in the works of Browning there are so many ideas that it is often difficult to see the idea. To the modern writer of anything like Shakespeare's calibre, or Browning's, the simple joy in the story is no longer possible, and probably Shakespeare, if born forty years ago, and if content to work for such a medium as the stage, would, like an Ibsen, have chosen themes that do not appeal to our people. But was Shakespeare, "Shakespeare"?

It is not merely a want of the knack of playwriting—a vulgar, useful term—that kept Browning or Tennyson from success on the stage. No one ever had such a prodigious "knack" as Ibsen, and *Rosmersholm* is the most amazing *tour de force* of craftsmanship. Yet despite his influence upon modern drama, Ibsen—a great poet, a great thinker, a great observer, and the greatest of craftsmen—has been unpopular as a dramatist in

England.

One begins to see that an element in the answer to be given to the question is the fact that some of the great writers who have failed upon the stage owe their want of success in part to their over-estimation of the power of the acting play to convey ideas, and consequently to their putting so much more into their work than the average audience can get out that the public shirks the task of grappling with them at all. Shakespeare, under peculiar circumstances, was grappled with before our time, and has been predigested for us; but the others have had no such fortune. Moreover, much of the national dramatist's finest work is cut when his works are produced and some are rarely given, others never.

Several able writers, such as Robert Buchanan, have rushed to the opposite extreme and obtained ephemeral success by empty plays injurious to their reputation as men of letters, and a few of us think that one of our most successful and brilliant novelist-playwrights has a dangerous tendency in this direction. It is, of course, given to few to judge so perfectly as Pinero what is the extreme quantity of thought that can be put into a play without frightening the public, and he has had more than one splendid failure from taking too hopeful a view of the intelligence of playgoers.

The Ending of the Play

A large number of readers begin a novel at the wrong end, particularly those of the sex many members of which are threatened with moustaches, according to the latest hysterical shriek of certain medicine-men, because of their weakness for putting cigarettes between their dainty lips. They look at the last chapter before reading the first; the practice is indefensible, criminal. Authors take an immense amount of trouble in working up logically to a conclusion and preparing the minds of their readers for it, and most of this trouble goes by the board if you begin by reading the last chapter. In the case of the humbler classes of fiction the injury to the writer is even greater: he has endeavoured by manoeuvres, limited in character by certain laws of the game, to spring a surprise upon the reader by puzzling her as to the ending of the story and she, instead of "playing the game" and trying to unravel it, "cuts the Gordian knot," the most hackneyed *cliché* in the *répertoire* of the journalist. This grossly unfair treatment of novelists ought to be punished, or at least be subject to procedure in the Chancery Division for breach of confidence.

The really honest reader shrinks from such an offence as if it were eavesdropping. It is well known that many novels actually begin with the last chapter. The Irishism represents the fact that the author starts by exhibiting people in a dramatic position and then proceeds to show how they came to be there.

There is always something of this method in a play. One cannot conveniently begin, like Sterne, with the birth of the hero—and even a little before—and work steadily forward. "Tristram Shandy," it may be, is a poor example, since "steadily" is perhaps the worst adjective in the dictionary to describe the progress of that novel. Of course there are plays in which a prologue is employed, but the device is clumsy; and in these instances, when the real drama is reached, an explanation of what has happened during the gap between the prologue and the first act is necessary.

In other words, part of the author's work and a great part of his difficulty lie in telling the audience a number of antecedent facts. The task has grown very difficult since soliloquies have gone out of vogue and audiences become so sophisticated as to smile at the old-fashioned conversations in which information is given to the house by causing the hero to tell to his friend—"his friend Charles"—a number of matters with which, to the knowledge of everybody, Charles is already well acquainted.

It is a misfortune that in the case of cleverly constructed dramas the uncritical members of the playgoing world, whilst half-conscious of the fact that the preliminary circumstances are not being told to them in the clumsy method now out of date, fail to get the full amount of pleasure from the technical skill exhibited. Take, for instance, what in this respect is perhaps the masterpiece, *Rosmersholm*. Few spectators consider it closely enough to appreciate the wonderful skill shown in conveying to the audience the vast number of facts and ideas necessary to explain the exact relations between Rosmer and Rebecca West when the play begins. However, it is hardly worth the while of the casual playgoer to study the structure of dramas sufficiently to appreciate fully such marvels of technique—the marvels are very rare.

Something might be said in favour of plays—and it was said by Prosper Mérimée—in which no knowledge of the previous histories of the parties is necessary. It is doubtful, however, whether there exists any specimen of this class of drama, and perhaps it is impossible completely to comply with such conditions.

Whether much or little is told to the audience of the things that have happened and the characters before the play begins, the last act in the ordinary drama is of an extravagant importance in relation to the whole. It has been said, with a fair amount of truth, that anybody can write a good first act, and that most plays fail towards the end. Instead of putting his confidence in the maxim "Well begun is half done," the author must rely on another which may be expressed as "Well ended is much mended."

The question how to bring a play to a close has been terribly difficult on very many occasions to the dramatist. There are various kinds of conclusion, most of them more or less formal or conventional. For instance, everyone knows what will happen towards the last fall of the curtain in the peculiarly exasperating species of drama founded upon a misunderstanding which in real life would be cleared up in five minutes, but on the stage remains unsolved for three hours or so. Countless plays end with a definite engagement of young sweethearts the course of whose love became rough at the close of the first act, or with the reconciliation of youthful spouses who quarrelled in the earlier part of the piece.

This, of course, is the so-called "happy-ever-after" ending: in most cases the comedies of this type are so artificial that few of the audience take sufficient interest in the characters to think of them as people who live after the play, and to notice the fact that the sweethearts are from their nature unlikely to live happily

together, or that the young husband and wife, on account of their dispositions, are certain to quarrel within a week of the reconciliation. Plays of these kinds are essentially unimportant. Nobody cares very much how they end provided that the curtain falls not later than at a quarter-past eleven.

Real tragedies, whether of the classic, modern or romantic type, end in death or deaths. Obviously there is no other solution in most cases. Perhaps in real life Hamlet would have remained letting I dare not wait upon I would until his mother and stepfather died in the ordinary course of nature; without any amazing interposition of Providence, Romeo and Juliet might have healed the quarrel between their hostile houses and established a large family of little Montague-Capulets, and so on; but one accepts the proposition that such outcomes would be contrary to the essential laws of the existence of such plays.

Difficulties grow when we come to comedy that seeks to represent, however timidly, the life of real human beings. The bold dramatists who endeavour to represent a slice of life—Jean Jullien invented the phrase—find more difficulty in the beginning of their plays than the conventional writer: to bring them to anything like a full stop is a very rare achievement. A great many end at a comma, a semi-colon is noteworthy, a colon superb, and very often one has a mere mark of interrogation at the last fall of the curtain. Of course a full stop sometimes is achieved, for instance in the case of *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*; but *Iris* ends with something very much like a comma, and *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* can scarcely boast of more than a colon.

Ibsen has not always been successful in coming to his conclusions. In a sense *A Doll's House* might be called a failure: the case is one of the note of interrogation, and the audience is left in a mood of dissatisfaction, since, being deeply interested in the character of Nora, it is intensely curious to know what she will do next. Homes have been broken up and friendships wrecked by discussion upon the question, though it must be admitted that most of the quarrels concerning the play have been upon the irrelevant question whether the child-wife ought to have left her husband and children. One half of the disputants fail to see that the fact that she does abandon them is the catastrophe and not the conclusion of the comedy. In *An Enemy of Society* and *A Lady from the Sea* the author has been remarkably adroit in getting to a definite conclusion.

On the other hand, one sees that even such a master of his craft was forced to call death to his aid in many cases; for instance, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master-BUILDER*, *Rosmersholm*, *John Gabriel Borkmann*, and *When we Dead awaken*. In nearly all of these the death is not accidental but inevitable. *The Wild Duck* has a tragic death in it which is by no means conclusive; indeed, it is a horrible humour of the work that the last idea of all is the suggestion of a continuing tragic comedy.

The inconclusive conclusion is unpopular. There is a strong craving in the public to have plays nicely rounded off, and this is a serious obstacle to writers who seek to represent real life, which seems to have a sort of prejudice against rounding-off human affairs neatly. In a vast number of cases the great crises in human life are followed by a tedious kind of dragging anti-climax.

Great monarchs still live after their fall. The Napoleon of the stage would have died at Waterloo instead of crawling out of life at St Helena. One need not multiply instances after such a prodigious example. Managers naturally respect—some will say "pander to"—the public taste; wherefore our real life plays rarely see the footlights, and when they do sometimes are cruelly forced into an artificial ending.

From time to time one even sees quaint announcements that, owing to the wishes of the public, the conclusion of a particular play has been twisted from the author's original idea into some termination that gratifies the audience's desire to leave the theatre in a mood to enjoy a supper afterwards. The question of art involved in the matter hardly needs discussion. No one will deny that, in comedy at least, the greatest suggestion of truth is the greatest art, even whilst admitting that the inevitable circumstances of the production of a play demand certain modifications and adjustment of truth. The dramatist can never hold the mirror up to Nature; he can only reflect her in a distorting glass.

A few years ago in a play that made a sensation came the worst example of the forced conventional "happy-ever-after" ending on record. The case was that of *An Englishman's Home*, where there was foisted upon the author, who was abroad, a quite imbecile happy ending which caused much discussion: it is not unlikely that this crime against drama and the dramatist prevented the piece from enjoying the immense success confidently prophesied for it.

Nowadays authors are in a greater difficulty, because people—particularly the so-called "smart" folk—are eager to get away early for supper, whilst many are compelled to steal off to catch trains to Brighton and other suburbs, and leave the theatre before the ending of a play. The result threatens to be curious. The dramatists will be induced to make their big effort in the penultimate act, leaving nothing for the last but some tranquil rounding off which you may miss without serious loss. Instead of the notice, often, alas! untrue: "The audience is requested to be seated punctually at eight o'clock, since the interest in the play begins at the rise of the curtain," we shall have: "Members of the audience anxious for supper or to catch suburban trains are requested to leave before the curtain rises on the last act, which is only a kind of needless epilogue."

We had some trace of this new epilogue method in *Leah Kleschna*, as well as in *Letty*. How the critics of the morning papers would bless such a system! At the same time, it is imaginable that the authors will raise a difficulty—they are such an exacting race!

However, a brilliant suggestion has been made of a way of dealing with the difficulty. "Why not," asks a fair correspondent, whose letter has incited this article—"why not begin with the last act?" The scornful may answer with the question, "Why begin at all if you've nothing better than our ordinary drama?" but they must be kept out of court. There really is something in the idea. Public interest flags somewhat in the case of ordinary plays because the house knows too well the things that are going to happen; it might be stimulated

by seeing them happen and then watching the development of the facts leading up to them. This suggestion is not protected in any way, either in England or the United States.

Preposterous Stage Types

The title may sound a little misleading, Ruskinian, Horne-Tookian: probably the word "preposterous" would not have been used but for an accidental remembrance of De Quincey, who was so fond of using and explaining it, of pointing out that it signified the behind-before, the cart before the horse, the hysteron-proteron. By-the-by, why has De Quincey gone out of fashion? There are charming reprints of almost everybody who is somebody, and of somebodies who really are nobodies; even Alexander Smith is being talked of; yet, if you want a full feast of De Quincey you must go to ill-printed pages bound horribly. However, except so far as Shakespeare is concerned, the author of a famous essay on Wilhelm Meister has left us little on the topic of the stage. A casual question brought forward the subject: it was whether Sothorn's Dundreary really represented an English type. To answer this is a matter of some difficulty.

The fact remains that if Dundreary did not represent a type, at least it created one. Dundrearys became quite numerous after Sothorn's success; and the observant have remarked that not infrequently a stage character has verified itself by a species of ratification—a remark that has a flavour of Ireland, or, if a famous essay by Miss Edgeworth is to be accepted, a flavour of France—this is a reference to her essay on Irish bulls, a title itself which happens to be unconsciously a bull.

The "mashers" and "crutch and toothpick brigade" of the stage were rather the progenitors than imitators of the type, and the Gibson girls were more numerous after the appearance of Miss Camille Clifford than before she came to London. It might be indiscreet to go further into details and cite more modern instances on the topic.

One can hardly call this, holding the mirror up to Nature, yet, in a curious roundabout way, the stage seems to justify itself and become true after the event. There was a rather bitter discussion some time ago between an author and a critic; the latter had remarked that the language of the dramatist's people did not sound true, that it seemed composed of scraps from the stage, that he generally could guess from the cue the words of the answering speech.

This, of course, is very often the case; probably to the simple-minded playgoer when it happens there seems to be evidence that the dialogue is true. The characters say what he expects them to say—therefore, that which to him it seems natural for them to say. Perhaps the judgment of the simple-minded playgoer is sounder on this point than that of the critic, who is hoping that the characters will utter something that he does not expect them to say. Probably a large number of the stereotyped phrases of our actual speech come from the novel or stage, and although when they were first spoken the truth was not in them, they have come to be truly representative of the characters.

Novelists of standing are more nicely squeamish on the subject than dramatists of similar rank; they endeavour to avoid—in dialogue—the ready-made article; at the same time one notes that the important dramatist is very anxious to keep clear of the stage-worn phrases.

We know that to some extent people do accept the judgments in plays as judgments on life, and mould their conduct on that of the characters. Even the daughter in *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, with her views based on melodrama concerning her mother, was not wholly extravagant. Of course this puts a rather heavy responsibility upon dramatists. The *Jack Sheppard* and *Dick Turpin* plays are said to have fired many youths with a desire to become romantic criminals, and even caused them to make efforts to carry out their desires. Nowadays—at least in the theatres within our province—such pieces are not presented; nor would one quarrel with the Censor if he were to prohibit one of them. There is little peril in a work like *Raffles*; for though it would not be difficult to exhibit skill in crime as great as that of the hero, a capacity for being a first-class cricketer and an education at Eton seem to be essential elements of the character, and these serve as insurmountable stumbling-blocks to many. Yet a *Raffles* may set a fashion and have humble imitators, so far as personal style is concerned, among the professors of the fine art of crib-cracking.

The Professor Moriarty of *Sherlock Holmes* really employed too much machinery to be copied by the crowd.

That the stage sometimes takes the lead in the matter of costume cannot be disputed—possibly the day will arrive when the emancipation of man from the thrall of the "topper," the frock-coat and stiff collar is brought about through the energies of the theatre—though it will require a London actor of the Le Bargy type to achieve such a triumph, and he is not yet in sight, and may not appear until after the motorist has accomplished the miracle. At present, even in the matter of ladies' frocks, the London stage has less influence than one might have expected.

At the moment one seeks vainly for any stage type likely to create a character which afterwards it will seem to reflect. Perhaps Mr G.P. Huntley has had some success in this respect; certainly it is imaginable that if he were to represent a well-written part in comedy as a kind of twentieth-century Dundreary we should meet imitators of him in shoals; but this has yet to come, and if it does a good many people will fail to rejoice—a phrase without prejudice to admiration for a player concerning the limits of whose power as a comedian one may well have real curiosity.

Turning back for a moment to the dialogue, one can hardly feel surprised that playwrights are easily satisfied with ready-made phrases; we journalists cannot "throw stones" at them—a figure the almost unintentional use of which illustrates the difficulty. It is a very hard task to invent new phrases for your characters that will seem congruous, and there is always the peril of appearing affected in style. Yet success is possible, as may be seen in the works of a few, such as Pinero; even he shows a tendency, noteworthy in *Letty* and, to a less degree, in *His House in Order*, towards causing some characters to talk "bookily," which,

after all, is better than making them speak journalistically. Still, in dealing with this point the dramatist must remember that many people in real life use habitually a large number of ready-made phrases, even when they are in a serious mood.

The Professions of the Dramatis Personae

If the historian of the future, in the endeavour to get a clear idea of the social life of our times, turns to the contemporary drama in search for information, he will find very little matter of value. Yet the mere fact of the success of some of the plays will give him an idea of the taste, or lack of taste, of the public, and the failure of others will speak eloquently, but sadly, to him about the audiences of to-day.

The first phenomenon to impress him must be the fact that in a large proportion of the dramas professing to deal with current social life the chief persons are the drones of society and the rich people of leisure or labour, most of them with handles or tails to their names. Half of our comedies are supposed to pass among the "nobs," and the middle-class characters are merely introduced as a necessary part of the machinery. It has been said that the British people dearly loves a lord, and a belief in this may be one reason why the upper ten thousand furnish so many of the heroes and heroines.

A further fact is that certain managers are alleged to think that their theatres gain in dignity by presenting Mayfair plays, and perhaps there are players who take a great joy in appearing as Lord this, or Lady that, or the Honourable somebody. Indeed, there was a case where an actor-manager usurped a king's prerogative and transferred the chief characters in a play by a young dramatist to the celestial regions of Burke, notwithstanding the protest of the author, who admitted his absolute ignorance of the manners, ways of thought, and style in conversation of the inhabitants of Belgravia: no changes were made except in the names, and yet nobody suggested that the play was particularly rich in solecisms.

This form of snobbery has at least one advantage, it saves the playwright from the trouble of considering the questions of money in the play. If there is to be an elopement in it there is no difficulty on the score of expense—a difficulty that, in vulgar real life, has caused some intrigues to become sordid hole-and-corner divorce dramas instead of idylls of passionate irregular love.

One notices that certain professions are under a kind of ban upon the stage. The country contains thousands of solicitors, most of them well educated and drawn from the class that feeds the Bar, the Church, the Army, Navy, Medicine, Science and the Arts. This body of solicitors has an enormous influence upon the conscience of the country—more influence than any other class, except, perhaps, that of the parsons. How is the solicitor treated on the stage? Almost always with contempt, at the best as a humble adviser. He is the comic character or the villain; generally, as a further insult, the secondary villain. The attorney is sometimes the hero of a farce, as in *The Headless Man*—never in comedy, or to be more correct, hardly ever, for Mr Granville Barker in *The Voysey Inheritance* gave a very fine and sympathetic study of a young solicitor. The dramatist may say in defence that he is truthful, that he merely reflects the vulgar prejudice against the profession, founded upon the misdeeds of a very small proportion of its members.

The barrister receives better treatment, but, of course, he is generally deemed to be a more "genteel" person; yet, in considering stage barristers, one notices that they are drawn very superficially, that their profession is accidental to the play, and little or nothing turns on the influence of the career upon the man. Judges, like solicitors, are usually regarded as comic.

Our stage has hardly inherited Molière traditions concerning the doctors; there were two important plays, *The Medicine Man* and *The Physician*, in which members of the healing art are treated seriously—though Dr Tregenna in the former was rather a caricature, and in *The Doctor's Dilemma* we had a brilliantly painted group of medical men. The Christian Scientist may complain of neglect, even if there was some anticipation of him in *Judah*, and a humble branch of the craft was handled ably by Mrs Merrick in *Jimmy's Mother*. The real quack has remained almost unscathed.

The army, of course, has not been neglected. Half the Lotharios of modern drama belong to the destructive profession, and the peppery or tedious colonel is an old stock friend; whilst the "Dobbin" type is handled very frequently, and the V.C. has been bestowed more often by dramatists than by royalty. The modern officer of the good type, the man with an honest, energetic interest in his profession, is rarely presented.

What about the navy? There was *The Flag-Lieutenant* and also *Captain Drew on Leave*, the latter a somewhat unpleasant picture, fortunately exhibiting no trace of the sailor's spirit or style of thought. One cannot complain nowadays of a lack of parsons or Nonconformist ministers, though it is irksome to see that the latter, as a rule, are presented in an odious light, by way, probably, of a mean little revenge for the hostility of the Nonconformist to the theatre—a hostility which could hardly surprise any dispassionate person who considers the present state of the stage.

The architect, save in *The Master Builder*, is almost unknown; the engineer, unspecialised as a rule, figures vaguely sometimes.

Perhaps one ought to write guardedly concerning the journalist. Still, at least, facts may be stated. As a rule he appears as reporter or interviewer, and is treated comically. In *The Perfect Lover* Mr Sutro handles him seriously, and that play contains an elaborate picture of a weak-minded journalist as well as a wicked solicitor. Of the existence of thousands of men, highly educated and many of them possessing brilliant degrees, connected with the enormous newspaper interest of this country, the stage takes no cognizance. A dramatic critic occasionally is exhibited—as a rule in connexion with the champagne-and-chicken theory.

The vast army devoted to science is almost ignored, though sometimes the inventor has a kind of "innings": in *The Middleman* Mr Henry Arthur Jones made a striking figure of him. Financiers, business men, merchants

and the like have little justice done to them. To the dramatist the fraudulent is the only interesting financier. He certainly is very fond of working on the *Mercadet* basis. He commonly confounds the stockbroker with the bucket-shop keeper, and invariably assumes that the company promoter is a thief. The merchant or manufacturer tends to replace the French uncle from America, and his wealth rather than himself is employed by the playwright to get his characters out of a mess.

The novelist or poet is a difficult person for stage treatment; the pictures of the dramatist in the theatre are curiously unlikelike—as unlikelike as the theatrical managers on the stage. There are reasons for this that need not be discussed.

It seems a pity that the playwrights, when dealing with life in the strata above shopkeeping, should not apply themselves more fully to the study of the enormous class which is the backbone of the country, instead of choosing so often merely the idle classes, members of which as a rule are less highly individualized. One may apply to the characters in many of our comedies certain phrases used by Théophile Gautier: "The personages belong to no particular time or country. They come and go without our knowing why or how; they neither eat nor drink, they do not live in any particular place, and have no *métier*."

The "neither eat nor drink," of course, is quite inapplicable; we have far too much eating and drinking on the stage. The low, comic meals of the *Adelphi* are replaced by similar or slightly more "genteel" humours of comic eating in comedies. It may be that this phenomenon is due to a belief that playgoers want to see something in the theatres far divorced from its ordinary life, but this belief seems hardly consistent with certain notable tendencies towards realism. Undoubtedly the public has not grown tired of plays dealing seriously with current human life; it has had no opportunity of growing tired of them.

Since this was written the "Yellow Journalism" editor has twice appeared, once in the brilliant comedy called *What the Public Wants*, by Mr Arnold Bennett, where Mr James Hearn represented him superbly, and on the other occasion in Mr Fagan's clever work called *The Earth*, when Mr M'Kinnel acted ably. Also we have had an engineer in *The Building of Bridges* and a doctor in *Fires of Fate*.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OUR STAGE AND ITS CRITICS ***

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