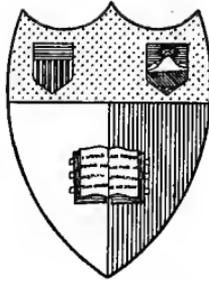


THE FOUNDATIONS OF
A NATIONAL DRAMA

HENRY ARTHUR JONES



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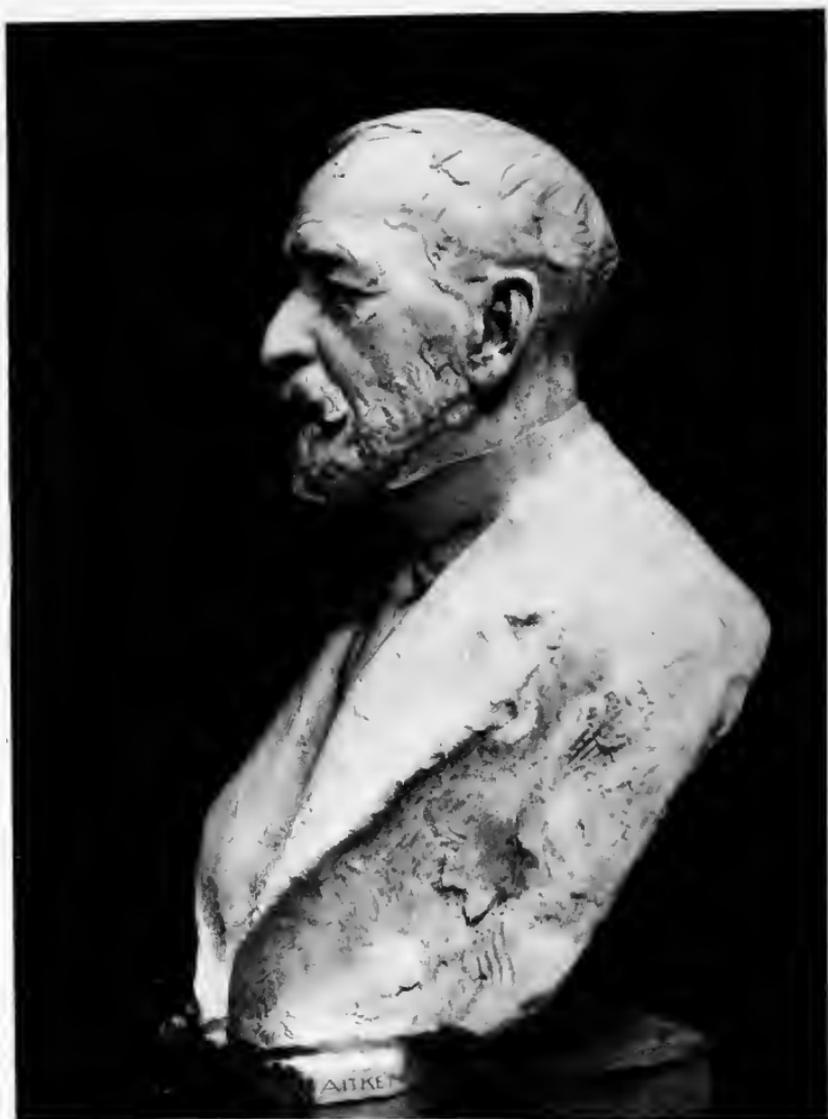


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THE FOUNDATIONS OF A
NATIONAL DRAMA



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Henry Arthur Jones
From the bust by Robert J. Aitken

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A NATIONAL DRAMA

*A COLLECTION OF LECTURES, ESSAYS
AND SPEECHES, DELIVERED AND
WRITTEN IN THE YEARS 1896-1912
(REVISED AND CORRECTED, WITH ADDITIONS)*

BY
HENRY ARTHUR JONES

“Receive the truth, and let it be your balm”
KEATS

LONDON
CHAPMAN & HALL, LTD.

1913

TO

BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE
IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MY DEAR BRANDER MATTHEWS,

I have so often quoted you in the following pages, that I am urged by duty, no less than by friendship and sympathy, to dedicate this book to you.

Always faithfully yours,

HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

PREFACE

November, 1912.

HUXLEY tells us that at the outset of his career he asked himself what was the best thing he could wish for himself in life: and that after much pondering he could think of no gift so desirable to beg from fortune as the courage always to speak the truth upon any matter of public concern, with perfect fearlessness and sincerity, taking no heed of personal consequences. The record of that great clear thinker and writer shows that the fairies granted him his request. Indeed what better thing could any man ask for himself at the beginning of life; or wish to hold fast through the struggles and confusions of his midway years; or find a greater satisfaction and pride in cherishing as his dearest possession at the close?

I may claim that a desire to know and to speak the exact truth about the matters dealt with in the following papers has been the only motive that has urged me, often against my interests and inclinations, to write them. My one wish has been to gain for myself and to spread amongst playgoers a knowledge of those facts and conditions and rules which will help to develop an intellectual drama in England, and to make our theatre an object of national pride and esteem, the admiration instead of the contempt of Europe. — And I could be well content to learn that the knowledge of those facts and conditions and rules has so far advanced into practice on our actual stage, that already these essays and lectures have become obsolete and needless.

But have we reached such a goal? We may be on the road to it, and one sees many encouraging signs

that our faces are set in the right direction. But are we yet within measurable distance of it? Of the many interesting and deservedly successful plays produced in the last few years, how many of them will be heard or spoken of in ten years' time? How many of them will bear examination in the study? Will one of them take a permanent place in English literature?

But without a national repertory of new plays there can be no measure of present attainment, no compass to show our path, no certainty of advance, but only more or less aimless drifting.

It will doubtless be thought that I have given far too much regard and praise to French acting and French authorship. Much of the esteem in which the French theatre and the French drama have been held amongst us has perhaps been reflected from French opinion and French esteem. We think highly of their drama, because they think highly of it themselves. We largely accept them at their own valuation. But how quickening and how fostering to the French drama and French acting has been the high regard in which they have always been held by the literary and cultivated classes. Compare the interest in their national drama and the knowledge of it, shown by French statesmen, men of letters, artists and scientists, with the interest in and knowledge of the English drama shown by the same classes in our own country.

It is true that to-day we have not so much to learn from French authors and actors, or so much occasion to envy them, as we had a generation ago. And it is likely that as we develop a national drama of our own, we shall have less and less need to look to France for models.

But even to-day I think my estimate of the French drama and French acting must be allowed to remain as a fair one. We may get a true idea of how we stand in comparison with France, if we read the recently published two volumes of criticism, *Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui*, by M. Benoist. Suppose that an English

or American critic of equal literary and dramatic attainments with M. Benoist, had to review the English and American drama of the last fifteen or twenty years, and suppose that he selected an equal number of authors and plays of the best repute during that period, could he find a knot of dramatists and a body of dramatic material at all comparable with those chosen for judgment by M. Benoist? To ask the question is to answer it. But if with pardonable national pride and confidence we say that we have such a body of dramatic material, are we not then driven to ask ourselves how it is that only at rare intervals does one of our melodramas or farces get a cheap fugitive success with Parisian audiences; while when we offer them one of our recent masterpieces we meet with a polite but chilling rebuff, which should make us question the validity of our judgments. Surely the useful *entente cordiale* has given Frenchmen some excuse for admiring our modern drama, or at least of saying that they admire it. But they have not changed their standards, and have largely thrown upon ourselves the duty of praising our recent masterpieces.

Whereas almost every play that obtains a moderate success in Paris is seen at one of our West End theatres, and with all its characters and morals and manners grotesquely denationalized, obtains perhaps a greater success in London than it has done in Paris.

Again, there is a fairly large demand amongst English readers for French published plays and for English translations of them; while the students of the modern English drama in France could probably be counted on one's fingers. And further, if we ask what are the qualities which mainly distinguish the best modern French drama from the best modern English drama, we may set them down, apart from the crowning grace of literary expression, as sanity, universality, urbanity; freedom from oddity, perversity, queerness; freedom from assertive self-consciousness;

freedom from childish freakishness and sentimentality ; a clearer, wider, and more humane outlook upon life ; a larger and less confused handling of the questions of the hour ; a surer grip of permanent passions and emotions, and an easier, more genial, less clumsy treatment of human foibles and follies. We may perhaps claim that the English drama has greater naturalness and more humour.

Again, it has always been an incidental function of serious French drama to preserve the purity and distinction of the French language, to stay it from becoming slipshod and slangy. And it has always been an incidental function of the French theatre to preserve a clear and articulate diction, to set a high standard of correct enunciation. At a recent gathering Sara Bernhardt was the only speaker in English who could be distinctly heard at the back of a small hall. Every syllable got home.

It could scarcely be asked without transparent irony how far the modern English drama has been a means of preserving the vigour and purity of the English language, and how far the English theatre has been a means of setting a standard of just accent and clear diction.

I will ask those who frequent the pits in our London theatres whether their attention is not so constantly strained to hear what the actor is saying that the author's meaning is blanketed or lost.

These reasons will I hope suffice to clear me from the charge of having unduly praised modern French drama and modern French acting at the expense of our own.

I have found great difficulty in arranging the various papers. A chronological sequence would have divided the different subjects. But these frequently overlap each other, and are sometimes interwoven in a single paper. The attempt at a division into subject-matter has therefore resulted in some rupture of the main lines of argument ; and some want of order in the presentation of facts, and of the conclusions to be drawn from them.

The volume will be found to contain a ceaseless repetition of a few certain leading rules and principles and convictions. But it has only been by constant and tiresome assertion and reiteration during thirty years that these rules and principles are beginning to win acceptance as the foundations of a national drama. And it is only by continued insistence upon them that a larger public will unconsciously absorb them as the guides of their tastes and habits in the theatre.

Some apparent inconsistencies will, I think, yield to reconciliation when it is remembered that the subject-matter is complex, and presents many different aspects, some of them constantly shifting. Other inconsistencies and contradictions will be found in minor and debatable matters. In these it is often wiser to keep a loose and easy mind than to cling obstinately to a set opinion.

But on all the large and commanding issues, the issues that will assuredly mould the character and govern the development of the English drama in the succeeding generation, there will be found no want of clearness or decision, nor any contradiction or inconsistency.

One of the most important of these issues is the relations between the English drama and the English theatre. These are glanced at and outlined in many passages of the following papers, but are not treated fully and succinctly. And I fear these passages may leave the impression that I have been jealous and envious of the great sister art to the drama; that I have been one-sided in my views, and ungenerous in my treatment of it. When I have leisure I hope to deal with the matter more exhaustively, and to remove that impression if I have created it. Meantime I plead that some watchful jealousy may be forgiven to an artist if it is roused on behalf of his craft, and is not merely the expression of personal spite and disappointment.

I have said that the issue is a most important one. In England the drama and the theatre are generally

supposed by the public to be one identical corporate institution. Irving was oddly enough regarded, and always spoken of, as the head and representative of the British *drama*. Consider what this implies.

The drama and the theatre are always collusive and allied; they are never identical; they are scarcely ever equal; they are sometimes antagonistic, and are often obstructive of each other's highest efforts. What is the meaning of the very significant fact that in a great creative dramatic era (that of Shakespeare) acting naturally becomes auxiliary, and is comparatively unimportant; while in eras of great and distinguished acting (those of Garrick, Kean, and Macready), the current drama is regarded as auxiliary and as comparatively unimportant?

Again, this necessary rivalry between the drama and the theatre is apparent if we glance at the English stage during the last ten years; and if we ask, not where the most successful plays have been produced, but where the alivest and most penetrating work has been done for the drama. The most successful plays have, of course, been produced at the most popular theatres by the most popular managers. That is natural and inevitable. But has not the most thoughtful and interesting drama been produced almost entirely outside our popular actor-managements; by private societies and small repertory companies; by those who are concerned with the advance of the English drama rather than with the success of the English theatre?

I will leave it there for the time, merely pointing out that in constantly urging, as I have done, that actors, and especially those who have to speak verse, should submit to long and severe training, I am merely saying that acting is a great and difficult art, and I am paying it a respect which is often in practice denied to it by actors themselves.

Of perhaps equal importance are the relations of our drama to musical comedy. Here again I shall doubtless

be accused of sourness, narrowness, jealousy, and self-interest. With regard to self-interest. I am not so unworldly and short-sighted as to be incapable of perceiving that nothing could be more damaging to one's immediate popularity and reputation than to challenge the favourite pastimes and amusements of the public; and to irritate the powerful interests who are concerned in providing them. I am aware that no action could be more injudicious, or more unwelcome, or seem more ungracious. And I would willingly have stilled my ineffectual murmurs, if any commanding voice had been raised in place of mine.

I think I have shown, both by my speech and action in the questions of the music halls and the Censorship, that I have a warm sympathy with the claim that all those who provide amusement for the people should have perfect freedom to give the public what it desires; and that the public should also have perfect freedom to obtain what it desires without the present senseless restrictions. But the very granting of this freedom gives a right, almost imposes a duty of criticism and guidance on the part of those whose constant occupation necessarily gives them the widest and most intimate knowledge and experience of these matters.

So anxious am I to avoid any personal strife and to secure a few peaceful years for work, that in preparing these papers for publication I have been frequently minded to withdraw all those passages which reflect upon the popularity of musical comedy. Let me again disclaim any innate aversion from a form of art which has offered to theatre-goers much that is charming and graceful and pleasing to the senses; which has given to the drama many admirable performers, amongst them such great actresses as Ethel Irving and Marie Tempest: which attained such a charming literary and musical distinction in the hands of Gilbert and Sullivan; and which offers such great opportunities for the display of satire, wit, fantasy, and romance. So far as regards

certain forms of it, I have said nothing more severe of them than I have heard more than once from the lips of Gilbert himself. If my strictures have had any influence upon public taste, which is very doubtful, they may be held to be justified. If, as is more likely, they have had no other effect than to stamp me as a churlish kill-joy eager to damp the gaiety of the nation, then the defenders of musical comedy may be so well content with that result as to leave it undisturbed.

Perhaps one day it will be seen that the matter is involved with deeper and more serious considerations, and it will be approached from a different aspect, and on a larger and wider plane. It will then be asked what was the favourite and characteristic type of theatrical amusement during the ten or fifteen critical years when the nation should have been gathering itself to meet an anxious destiny; the type that most surely and easily indicated the temper and habits of the people, their average mental capacity, their stock of moral and intellectual force; the type that was most secure from criticism; the type that was most widely encouraged and flattered by all classes from the lowest to the very highest in the land? What kind and level of general education did the overwhelming prevalence of such a type imply, and what commentary does it force us to make upon the results of popular education? How far did its ascendancy during that period necessarily obstruct the growth of a national drama on any higher level? Harmless perhaps in itself, and scarcely worthy of consideration or even of disapproval, how far did its easy universal acceptance denote a widely-spread reluctance to think clearly and rationally upon any of the serious issues of national or individual life; and a growing impatience with any one who suggests that there are such issues? If these questions are ever asked shall I be condemned for challenging the overwhelming popularity of musical comedy during the last fifteen years? Then I will rest condemned.

I would have withdrawn from these pages every allusion to the matter, but for these two reasons:—

- (1) There is no surer evidence as to the character and fibre of a people than is afforded by the nature and quality of their popular amusements, and especially of their drama.
- (2) It is impossible to have two opposing national standards of taste in the drama.

We have amongst us a movement for building a National Memorial Theatre to Shakespeare, and the public is asked to subscribe a large amount for the purpose. Before going any further, let us inquire what must be the prevailing standard of national taste in the drama before such a theatre can hope to be successful on the level which its name implies. While the main currents of public taste are running strongly in other and contrary directions, such a theatre can be no more than at the worst a grotesque failure, at the best a second-rate futility, perhaps of less artistic or dramatic account than some of our present well-managed theatres. I say this as one of the staunchest and earliest supporters of the scheme; and because I wish to see it permanently established in the future on the sure foundation of a national comprehension and esteem, rather than struggling amongst devious and contrary opinions and ideals and petty personal interests, to some imperfect realization in the present, with the certainty of a speedy and humiliating collapse.

And such a collapse is almost unavoidable in the present state of public taste. There may be, there should be, wide varieties and forms of theatrical entertainment; but there cannot be two main opposing standards of national taste. Just as surely as any considerable supply of counterfeit coinage drives all the gold out of circulation, so surely does a base and counterfeit currency in any art drive out all the higher and finer things that are trying to contend with it. You cannot have two standards.

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF A NATIONAL DRAMA

I

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A NATIONAL DRAMA

A lecture delivered at the Royal Institution, Albemarle Street, on Friday evening, March 18th, 1904. Chairman, Sir William Crookes, F.R.S.

I AM to lecture you for an hour this evening, and I learn that it is not advisable to overstep that limit. As we have much ground to cover in the time, I hope you will forgive me for coming to the heart of the matter at once.

I would like, firstly, to convince you that it is a matter of some national importance to have a modern English drama. Then I will try to show you that we have scarcely anything that is worthy to be called by that name. Then I will try to indicate how we must set to work to get one, what are the foundations on which a national drama must be built.

A few months ago I read in one of our great leading dailies these words: "The English nation has made up its mind not to take its drama seriously." That is exactly the same as saying: "The English nation has made up its mind that it won't have any drama at all."

It would, I suppose, be generally agreed in any gathering of educated persons that the measure of a

people's advance in the fine arts is the measure of their distance from the brutes ; that in reality art is not merely auxiliary to civilization, but may almost be said to be civilization itself. "Life without art is," as Ruskin says, "mere brutality." Even religion itself is apt to become a crude and ghoulish superstition the moment it is separated from art. I need not affirm the value and importance of the fine arts generally, or show how little dignity, or beauty, or refinement, or even humanity can belong to the nation that rejects them. In England to-day the arts of painting, music, sculpture and architecture get a very scanty and grudging recognition from government. The English drama gets no recognition whatever. Now I do not wish to put the English drama into competition or comparison with the other arts, or to claim for it any pre-eminence over them. In any cultivated and well-organized society all the arts should have their due and separate spheres of influence, and all should meet with equal marks of national recognition and esteem.

But I hope you will justify me in saying that no other art is so intimately and vitally concerned with our daily national life as the drama. No other art so nearly touches and shapes conduct and practice. No other art can so swiftly move our thoughts and feelings, or stir our passions, or inspire and direct our actions. In sheer momentum, in vitality of impulse, in present and penetrating power and persuasion, all the other arts are dead and imaginary things, "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean," compared with the drama. And this is the art of which a leading English paper can say to-day in a most matter-of-fact tone, "The English nation has made up its mind not to take its drama seriously," as if it didn't matter whether we had a drama or not.

Let anyone who loves his country and has an afternoon to spare make a circular railway journey and visit the suburbs of London, and ponder them well. Let

him reflect upon the staple and mould of our present English civilization, upon the type of Englishman that we are breeding by millions. In ever-increasing numbers, and in ever-increasing proportions, our countrymen and women are living dull, ugly, monotonous, sedentary lives, packed together in little, dull, ugly, square, drab, brick boxes ; or in sections of large, dull, ugly, square, drab, brick boxes ; denying themselves access to pure air, and to most of the primary conditions of healthy, dignified human existence. Is it any wonder that a nation bred and housed under the conditions of English town-life to-day, nearly went down before a handful of farmers ? Will it be any great wonder if we do go down in the next European tussle ?

You are thinking I ought not to have said that ; you are thinking it is quite wide of the subject of my lecture. No, believe me, it is the very essence of my subject. These things are all of a piece ; all the strands and fibres of our national life are tensely connected with each other, and are interdependent.

The careless disorganization and confusion of thought that reigns in our drama is all of a piece with the careless disorganization and confusion of thought that reign in other and more important matters ; in our national religion ; in our national defences ; in our national industries. It is all due to the same causes ; to our want of alertness ; our want of drill ; our want of wit ; our resolute national hypocrisy ; our national insensibility to ideas ; our national hatred of ideals.

Perhaps during the last few moments you have paid that imaginary visit to the suburbs of London and our large towns. Now if we are content with the type of civilization that threatens to prevail there, if we are content that when an Englishman names the name of England, he shall conjure up for us vista upon vista of meaner and yet meaner Clapham Junctions, and drabby-yellow monotonous railway suburbs spread everywhere

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over our native land ; if that is our national ideal, there is clearly nothing further to be said, except that we seem to be in a very fair way to realize it.

But if we are discontented with such a prospect, if we wish to inflame these millions and millions of city dwellers with enthusiasm for great national ideals ; if we wish to persuade them to care for the things that are more excellent, for the things of the intellect and the spirit ; if we wish to sweeten their manners, to refine their tastes, to create a daily beauty instead of a daily ugliness in their lives, what instrument could be so swiftly and surely operative to these ends as a wisely-conceived, wisely-regulated and wisely-encouraged national drama ?

At the present moment we seem to be urged and beckoned on every hand to overhaul and reorganize our national resources, to set every room of our house in order. There is a general instinct of alarm and uneasiness, and whatever may be the result of the present search into the causes and conditions of our national prosperity, it will not be without some effect in every sphere of English thought and action. Now, in whatever spheres it may be decided to abandon the doctrine and policy of *laissez-faire*, I hope the English drama may put in a claim to be rescued from its present state of national neglect and national contempt. In that reorganization of our national means and resources ; in that refixing of our national aims and goals towards which we seem to be summoned, not merely by the warnings of statesmen and the shrill cries of contending politicians, but by those threatening, hovering portents—those pillars of cloud and fire that daily and nightly guide our nation to its destiny—in that awakening of new national hopes and ambitions and ideals, I hope I may put in a very urgent claim that the drama shall be recognized as a great civilizing and humanizing force, a great potential influence in our community, a great potential educator.

I use the word "educator" with much reluctance, knowing well that I shall be misunderstood and misrepresented by all those whose business and interest it is to keep the drama on its present level. But in the widest and truest sense I claim that in a closely-packed democracy such as ours, the drama is and must be an increasingly-powerful teacher, either of bad manners or of good manners, of bad literature or of good literature, of bad habits or of good habits. Potentially, it is the cheapest, the easiest, the most winning, the most powerful teacher of that great science which it so much concerns every one of us to know through and through, I mean the science of wise living. In that supreme science, the drama is or should be a supreme teacher, a supreme educator.

At the present moment the Archbishop of Canterbury and certain eminent Nonconformist divines are engaged in a lively controversy upon the recent Education Bill. Please be reassured. I am not about to break a lance on either side of that fight. Though I hope that like Peter in the New Testament, and like his namesake in "Romeo and Juliet," I shall ever be ready to draw my weapon in a good cause. But frankly, I have never been able to understand the matters upon which our spiritual fathers are passively resisting each other with so much vigour. There is a quarrel. It is as Sir Lucius O'Trigger says, "a very pretty quarrel as it stands," and one would be loth to destroy its symmetry by any unkind interference. I believe there is a genuine desire on each side to come to an agreement in this matter of education. May I very humbly point out to the Archbishop, and to my Nonconformist friends a way out of their perpetual misunderstandings and difficulties, a platform upon which they can shake hands and bury their present unfortunate dissensions? May I humbly suggest they should forget their differences upon the minor matters that so constantly embroil them, and join in a practical

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scheme for advancing the education of the masses in the widest sense; I mean in the establishment of a national drama that shall faithfully reflect and interpret to the English people the best realities and possibilities of their daily life. I assure you there is no shade of bitterness or irony in the suggestion I have thrown out to our spiritual fathers.

You are thinking perhaps that I have exaggerated the importance of the question I have raised. You are thinking that I have magnified it out of all proportion.

Consider again for a moment the millions of our citizens living sedentary, monotonous lives in their little, square, drab, brick boxes. The great majority of them have toiled during the day at desks, at looms, in shops, and warehouses, and offices, at some mere routine task, which instead of quickening the powers of their minds has rather clogged and deadened them. Now the dreary routine of the day is over, and these millions have gone forth to search for relaxation and amusement. I will ask you to enlarge the spaces of imagery in your minds until they contain seating capacity for hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions. Try to conceive all the vast audiences of our countrymen at this moment assembled in all the theatres and music halls of this kingdom. Summon them all before you. Multiply row after row, tier above tier, crowd upon crowd, at this moment listening, watching, laughing, weeping, hushed, applauding; here, catching a moment of responsive rapture from some heroic sentiment; there, grinning and chuckling at some half-veiled indecency; here, tasting the fine flavour of a choice Shakespearean passage; there, working themselves into a frenzy of vicarious valour by the cheapest jingo bluster; here, melting and sobbing over some scene of domestic pathos; there, rolling and roaring over some piece of stale buffoonery; here, mystified and awed by the tricks of the scene-shifter; there, startled and impressed by some

search-light flash into the human heart; here, peeping and leering at a ballet girl's skirts; there, watching some vivid sketch of character; here, being stupefied, imbruted, coarsened and vulgarized; there, being charmed, exhilarated, humanized, vitalized.

Again for a moment survey these myriads of amusement-seekers; catch the echoes of their "innumerable laughter"; the whirlwinds of their applause; put your finger on these millions of beating pulses. Consider how enormous, how far-reaching, how operative, not only upon manners, but indirectly upon conduct and character, must be the effect upon them of what occupies their evening hours of leisure. For the great majority of them [the hours of the day are dull and lifeless with mechanical, uninspiring labour—it is only in these two or three evening hours that nine-tenths of our population can be said to live at all. Surely it is a matter of supreme importance in our national economy whether our nation has a drama or not; whether it is fostered, organized and honoured; or whether it is neglected, disorganized and despised. Surely it is a national disgrace when it can be calmly said of us: "The English nation has made up its mind not to take its drama seriously."

For myself, outside the great permanent concerns of government—the defence of the country; the guarding of the national finances; the enforcement of law—outside a few such great matters, I cannot see what question has more intrinsic importance, or could so fittingly engage the attention of our legislators as the one I have brought before you to-night.

I will beg leave then to affirm on behalf of these myriads of amusement-seekers that it is desirable to have a national English drama; wisely regulated, wisely encouraged, thoroughly organized, suitably housed, recognized and honoured as one of the fine arts.

If I have convinced you on this point we can pass on to the second division of my subject. Perhaps it will be

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advisable to inquire what a national drama is or should be, what it should do for the people.

Clearly the first function of drama is to *represent* life and character by means of a story in action; its second and immeasurably higher function is to *interpret* life by the same means. But the first and fundamental purpose of the drama is to represent life.

If this sounds like a very cheap and obvious platitude, I will ask how many plays at the present moment on the London stage are representing life, or even pretending to do it? How many theatre-goers trouble to ask themselves whether they are seeing a picture of life? How many theatre-goers judge the play and the dramatist by that simple test? I will ask further, "Do nine out of ten of the present generation of theatre-goers look upon the theatre as anything but a funny place where funny people do funny things, intermixed with songs and dances? And where they are to be amused on the lowest intellectual level?"

I think if you will carefully listen to the remarks and judgments upon plays that come within your earshot during the next few months, even from cultivated men and women—I think you will come to the conclusion that the English playgoing public have for the most part lost all sense that the drama is the art of representing life, and that there is a keen and high pleasure to be got out of it on that level.

By the representation of life I do not mean that the drama should copy the crude actualities of the street and the home. Very often the highest truths of life and character cannot be brought into a realistic scheme. The drama must always remain like sculpture, a highly conventional art; and its greatest achievements will always be wrought under wide, and large, and astounding conventions. Shakespeare's plays are not untrue to life because they do not perpetually phonograph the actual conversations of actual persons.

I have not time here to do more than explain in the

briefest way that I am not contending for a realistic drama. In the past the greatest examples of drama have been set in frankly poetic, fantastic and unrealistic schemes. But whether a play is poetic, realistic, or fantastic, its first purpose should be the representation of life, and the implicit enforcement of the great plain simple truths of life. Realistically, or poetically, or fantastically, it should show you the lives and character of men and women; and it should do this by means of a carefully-chosen, carefully-planned and always progressive story.

Now let us take a glance at our London theatres and London audiences to-day and see what is being done there. The London theatres are fairly indicative of what is going on all over the country.

Looking down the list of the various entertainments at some twenty-five fashionable West-End theatres, it will be seen that most of them scarcely pretend to be pictures of life and character at all.

Gradually, during the last ten years—gradually, but ever more boldly and more successfully, the greater part of our West-End theatres have dissociated themselves from any attempts to present a picture of English life, or life of any kind; and have given an entertainment more and more approaching to a series of music-hall sketches, songs, and dances, threaded together by no rational, or plausible, or possible story. During the same ten years we have seen the bankruptcy of our leading Shakespearean theatre, and the dissolution of the aims and ambitions and hopes connected with it. At one or two other theatres we have had very beautiful, and one is delighted to say, fairly successful Shakespearean and poetic productions. But these Shakespearean productions have been mainly successful by reason of their pictorial elements; scarcely at all on account of their acting, or of their poetry. The West-End manager, who at great cost, with immense pains and research, puts on a play of Shakespeare, takes

his managerial life in his hands every time he does it. He thinks himself lucky if he can run it for a hundred nights and get back his expenses; while his neighbour, who puts up the latest piece of musical tomfoolery and buffoonery, is sure of the immense and cordial support of the English public; is sure of enormous and universal goodwill; is sure of a prosperous run of many hundred nights.

Turning to the drama of modern English life, we meet with corresponding tendencies and tastes on the part of the playgoing public.

Here I can only speak with bated breath and with some reserve, lest I should be accused of making this a personal question.

First let me gratefully acknowledge the immense favours I have received at the hands of the English playgoers. Next let me disclaim that I speak with any sense of present soreness or disappointment. It is by the continued grace and favour of English playgoers, it is by virtue of the rewards and recognition they have bestowed upon me that I am able to stand here and speak to them quite frankly and fearlessly on this matter. And I pay you and English playgoers the compliment of thinking that you would wish me to speak just what I feel.

Freeing myself then from the charge of any personal soreness and disappointment, I will say that I think we may all, playgoers, actors, critics, authors, feel great disappointment and very great apprehension on account of the present prospects of the modern English drama.

Ten years ago, in the years 1893 and 1894, we seemed to be advancing towards a serious drama of English life; we began to gather round us a public who came to the theatre prepared to judge a modern play by a higher standard than the number of jokes, tricks, antics, and songs it contained. To-day the English dramatist, who comes before his countrymen with a play in which he attempts to paint their daily life for

them in a serious straightforward way, finds that he is not generally judged upon this ground at all ; he is not generally judged and rewarded according to his ability to paint life and character ; he is generally judged according to his ability to amuse the audience without troubling them to think. And I believe that this tendency on the part of the English playgoers to demand mere tit-bits of amusement, and to reject all study of life and character in the theatre, I believe these tendencies and tastes have largely increased during the past ten years, and are still increasing. Insomuch we may say that the legitimate purpose of the drama, which is to paint life and character in a story ; and the legitimate pleasure to be gained from the drama, the keen and intellectual delight in watching a faithful representation of life and character and passion—this legitimate purpose and this legitimate pleasure of play-writing and playgoing are to-day swallowed up and lost sight of in the demand for more thoughtless entertainment, whose one purpose is not to show the people their lives, but to provide them with a means of escape from their lives. That is to say, the purpose of the entertainments provided in our most successful theatres is indeed the very opposite to the legitimate purpose of the drama, the very negation and suffocation of any serious or thoughtful drama whatever.

I do not say that one or two of us may not get an occasional success of a hundred and fifty nights with a comedy, or even with a play of serious interest, if by a miraculous chance one can get it suitably played. But any play of great serious interest, such as would meet with instant and great recognition and reward in France or Germany, is most likely to be condemned and censured by the mass of English playgoers as “unpleasant.”

I am aware that it is useless to condemn a man for not paying to be bored or disgusted. But the fact that he is bored and disgusted raises the further questions :

“Why is he bored and disgusted?” “What are the things that bore and disgust him?”

I question whether any subject has recently gathered around it such a thick fungus of cant and ignorance as that of the “problem play.” For a number of years past the parrot-phrase “problem play” has been applied to almost every play that attempts to paint sincerely any great passion, any great reality of human life. No doubt great extravagances and absurdities were committed by the swarm of foolish forcible-feeble playwrights who tried to imitate Ibsen. But the stream of just contempt that was poured upon these absurdities has run over its bounds, and has almost swamped all sincere and serious play-writing in England.

I was talking to a comfortable English matron some little time back. “Oh, I hope we shan’t have any more of those dreadful problem plays!” she exclaimed. “I like a nice pretty love story, where everything ends happily.” I could not help inquiring: “My dear Mrs. So-and-so, have you ever read your Bible?” A day or two after that, I met a middle-aged man in a club, a member of one of our oldest families. “I don’t like these problem plays,” he said; “I like legs!” Now these were representative playgoers, and they resented that the theatre should be used for its legitimate purpose of representing life. And so far as one can judge, this feeling has been largely spreading amongst playgoers during late years, and is still gaining ground, until we are forced to own that the large journal was very near the mark in saying: “The English nation has made up its mind not to take its drama seriously!”

Now I am not here to decry popular entertainment. English town life being what it is, the present condition of our theatres is doubtless the inevitable result. Granted the millions of dwellers in their little, dull, ugly, drab, brick boxes, what kind of recreation will they naturally seek? And we may cordially recognize

that nearly all our theatres are well conducted and are comfortable and clean and sanitary. There is scarcely a suburban theatre in London that in its interior arrangements does not put to shame the leading Paris theatres. And further we may cordially recognize that if most of the entertainments might more fittingly be described as "tomfoolery" than as "drama," yet a good deal of it is very excellent tomfoolery, very clever tomfoolery, and for the most part quite harmless tomfoolery. Some of it is indeed very ignoble tomfoolery, and one can frequently detect little witless and smirking indecencies, and allusions of a kind that one would expect to overhear on Margate pier on a bank holiday. And these little sniggering indecencies and ribaldries seem to me far more degrading, far more poisonous to morality than the broadest, frankest Rabelaisian mirth; or than that bold and fearless handling of the darker side of human nature which is so loudly reviled in realistic plays.

But on the whole it may be very cordially recognized that granted it is the chief business of the English theatre to supply the English public with bright and clever tomfoolery, then we may own that the English theatres are doing their duty. I say there is a very considerable alloy of very ignoble stuff, and a great deal of funny business which strikes one as very dreary and mirthless. In middle-class drawing-rooms we catch glimpses of a "funny" man, but even from those abodes the "funny" man is being expelled. I have never been able to understand why a "funny" man is less of a nuisance on the stage than he would be in a drawing-room. Let us hope that the day is not far distant when the "funny" man will be esteemed as great a nuisance in the theatre as he is in ordinary life. But many of the artists who appear in these musical pieces have an alertness and vivacity, a way of sending their lines home, a power of keeping their audiences awake, which one rarely finds amongst our ordinary actors. And this is

doubtless one of the causes of the comparative neglect of our spoken drama.

Meantime let me again disclaim any feeling of anger or jealousy against popular entertainment in itself. It is one of the first necessities for the dreary dwellers in the little dull, square, ugly, drab, brick boxes that they should be amused. But the point I wish to make is this—Popular entertainment is not the art of the drama; it provides an entirely different and lower pleasure from that given by the drama. Yet the drama is hopelessly confused in the public mind with popular amusement, and has to compete with popular amusement by sinking its own legitimate aims and ambitions. The drama which is the art of representing life is not judged from that standpoint at all; it lives a fitful hand-to-mouth existence, according as it happens to provide popular entertainment; and it is judged and rewarded almost entirely on that level.

Suppose that the English nation suddenly lost its passion for musical comedy, and developed a passion for the game of skittles. And suppose the rage for skittles became so great that all our fashionable West-End theatres were turned into skittle alleys. Suppose the confusion of ideas on the subject of skittles and the drama was as great as that which now exists on the subject of musical comedy and the drama. A lover of the drama might have no objection to skittles, might indeed be a lover of skittles; but if the drama were threatened with extinction on account of the rage for skittles, he would surely be right to urge, "There is nothing criminal in your love for skittles, but it is not the drama. In your rage to spend an empty evening and amuse yourself, you are killing a fine art."

Isn't a game at skittles physically and mentally a more invigorating entertainment than many of the entertainments of our West-End theatre? Yet if a rage of skittles should set in, the lover of the drama might surely be allowed to point out the difference

between the drama and the skittles, and gently to urge that it is not wise, it is not good national economy to riot in skittles at the expense of killing a fine national art. Now if we look round and watch what is taking place in many of our fashionable West-End theatres, I think we must allow that the rage for empty amusements threatens gradually to destroy what is still loitering or what is nascent of dramatic art in England.

I do not wish to be an alarmist, but no one can take up a daily paper and study the underclock announcements without allowing that lovers of the drama have the gravest cause for apprehension.

It is not all the fault of the public. Let us look at home. Doubtless some of the fault must rest upon the dramatists. Why don't we turn out a succession of masterpieces? In reply to this I have to urge a fact that is scarcely suspected by either playgoers or critics—yet it is a fact that governs the whole art or business of playwriting. A dramatic author is mainly conditioned in his choice and treatment of subjects and themes, by the possibility of getting them adequately played and adequately stage-managed at a theatre of repute. When a play is wrongly or inadequately represented, it is always the author who is held responsible. Now it is useless to blame actors or managers for the state of things which, if it has not entirely killed serious dramatic art in England, has completely paralysed it. The fault is in our present system. It is almost hopeless under our present system to write plays of great passion or serious intellectual import. In the region of mere drawing-room comedy, in the reproduction of certain little aspects of daily life, we have attained a high degree of perfection. We have a number of actors and actresses who can faithfully copy the behaviour of average persons in ordinary moments and situations, and the small mannerisms and habits of their different classes. We have a few very gifted actors and actresses who can do more than this; but many of our leading

actors and actresses are wofully deficient in the technique of their art; some of them are barely acquainted with the rudiments of elocution; the best of them are scarcely on a level in this respect with the average members of a municipal theatre in France. So that alike for the adequate representation of Shakespeare and of our classical comedies, and for the adequate representation of any play of modern life that tries to deal in a great way with great emotions, great phases of our present civilization, or great intellectual ideas—alike for these two classes of play we have no trained body of actors ready to interpret an author in such a way that the public may get at his meaning. Nor have we a trained body of playgoers ready to appreciate and respond to the author and actors.

I have now come to the end of the second division of my lecture. I have shown you, or tried to show you, that we have no modern English drama worthy of the name, worthy of a great nation.

If any of you think I have overstated my case, I refer you again to the current advertisements under the clock. And I pointedly ask the manager of every provincial theatre in the Kingdom whether he can get an audience for any poetical play, or any serious play of modern life, except on the rare visit of a London manager; I ask these provincial managers whether to-day there is an audience in any town in England for anything except a concoction of songs, dances and jokes, that do not even pretend to represent life; I point to the prosperity everywhere of great variety palaces that offer all kinds of popular amusement; and I point to the board that at the time of writing these words is placed across the façade of the Lyceum Theatre, announcing "This theatre to be sold."

I have spent so much time in clearing the ground for the foundations of a National Drama that I have left myself only a few moments to indicate how the foundations must be laid. I will ask you then to let

me state in the plainest and shortest way what the English nation must do if it wishes to have an English drama.

What are the necessary foundations of a national English drama ?

Speaking through you to the great body of English playgoers, I would say to them : If we are to have an English drama at all it is necessary :

1. To distinguish and separate our drama from popular amusement ; to affirm and reaffirm that popular amusement and the art of the drama are totally different things ; and that there is a higher and greater pleasure to be obtained from the drama than from popular amusement.

2. To found a national or repertory theatre where high and severe literary and artistic standards may be set ; where great traditions may be gradually established and maintained amongst authors, actors, critics and audiences.

3. To insure so far as possible that the dramatist shall be recognized and rewarded when and in so far as he has painted life and character ; and not when and in so far as he has merely tickled and bemused the populace.

4. To bring our acted drama again into living relation with English literature ; to dissolve the foolish prejudice and contempt that literature now shows for the acted drama ; to win from literature the avowal that the drama is the most live, the most subtle, the most difficult form of literature ; to beg that plays shall be read and judged by men of letters who are also judges of the acted drama. To bring about a general habit of reading plays such as prevails in France.

5. To inform our drama with a broad, sane, and profound morality ; a morality that neither dreads nor wishes to escape from the permanent facts of human life, and the permanent passions of men and women ; a morality equally apart from the morality that is

practised amongst wax dolls, and from the morality that allows the present sniggering, veiled indecencies of popular farce and musical comedy.

6. To give our actors and actresses a constant and thorough training in widely varied characters, and in the difficult and intricate technique of their art; so that in place of our present crowd of intelligent amateurs, we may have a large body of competent artists to interpret and vitalize great characters and great emotions in such a way as to render them credible, and interesting, and satisfying to the public.

7. To break down so far as possible, and at any rate in some theatres, the present system of long runs with its attendant ill-effects on our performers; to establish throughout the country repertory theatres and companies to the end that our actors may get constant practice in different parts; and to the end that the author may see his play interpreted by different companies and in different ways.

8. To distinguish between the play that has failed because it has been inadequately or unsuitably interpreted, and the play that has failed on its own demerits; to distinguish between the play that has failed because of the low aims or mistaken workmanship of the playwright, and the play that has failed because of the low tastes of the public, or because of mistakes in casting or production.

9. To bring the drama into relation with the other arts; to cut it asunder from all flaring advertisements, and big capital letters, and from all tawdry and trumpery accessories; to establish it as a fine art.

You will have noticed that some of these proposals overlap and include each other. Virtually they are all contained in the one pressing necessity for our drama that it shall be recognized as something distinct from popular amusement. And this one pressing necessity can be best and most effectually met by fostering the drama as a national art in a national theatre. If such

a theatre should be established and endowed either by the government or by a private gift, I would very gladly offer it a new play without any consideration of fees whatever.

I hope you will forgive me if I have seemed to be dictatorial and dogmatic throughout my lecture. I will ask you to accept my twenty-five years' practice of my art as some assurance that I do not speak lightly or without having very deeply considered the matter.

At the end of last year the London papers, almost without exception, bewailed the absence during its course of plays of serious interest and aim. But how can you expect that great plays will continue to be written unless there is a fair presumption that they will be adequately acted, and unless the public is prepared to judge them from a different standpoint from that of empty amusement?

Will you glance again for a moment at the mass and pattern of English town-life to-day, at the millions and millions of dreary dwellers in the little, drab brick boxes? and will you remember for a moment Milton's prophecy concerning the English nation? What instrument could be so powerful as a National English drama to raise our city dwellers to the height of that great prophecy? It will, perhaps, seem strange to quote it to you here, and at a moment like the present: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks; as an eagle renewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means."

I leave the matter to the "grave and solid judgment" of England.

II

THE CORNER STONES OF MODERN DRAMA

A lecture delivered to Harvard University, U.S.A., on the afternoon of Wednesday, October 31st, 1906. Chairman, Dean Briggs.

LET the first words I speak be those which shall most frankly and heartily own my great debt of gratitude to American playgoers. If to-day I am free from pressing, sordid cares, it is largely due to the continued favour which your nation has shown to my plays. For nearly a quarter of a century my work has been seen in all your leading cities, and every year has been a year of welcome and encouragement on your part, and every year has been a year of renewed and increasing indebtedness on mine. Let me then offer to you and through you to the great body of American playgoers, my most inadequate, but most deeply felt, most lasting, most sincere gratitude. You have bestowed upon me a crowning honour to-day in asking me to stand in this place and speak to you about the drama.

A friend of mine in England pardons himself any lapses from general truthfulness by affirming as a make-weight: "But I never tell lies about Art."

I believe that a clear vision and a feeling for rectitude in all the arts, would develop a new sense of national beauty and national dignity both in America and in England, and would also be a valuable lever to both nations in matters of conduct and character. I am persuaded that this clear vision, this right-thinking and right-doing in the popular art of the drama, would have

a wide, compulsive influence on national manners and behaviour. Therefore I hope you will allow me to adopt my friend's motto for these lectures, and to say, "I never tell lies about the Drama." I am sure you would wish me to treat this subject with the utmost candour and courage, to speak out of the fulness of my heart. And if I tell you some hard truths, and ask some harsh, rude questions, you must not think that I am exceeding the liberty and courtesy of a guest; for the same hard truths must be told, and the same rude, harsh questions must be asked about the drama in England. Indeed, I hope you will allow me for the moment to class England and America as twin nations in the affairs of the drama. So much interchange of plays and actors has taken place between the two countries; the means of communication have been so constantly quickened and increased, that now, for many years past, large currents of the two main streams of national drama have filtered through to each other, and have commingled, and are now flowing together. In the higher reaches, both of the modern and of the poetic drama, England and America may be largely reckoned as one country. Therefore I am not speaking simply to and for American playgoers. I still remain your debtor, and at the outset I must own that if you had a national American drama such as I desire for you, such as I see many signs of your compassing in generations to come—I say, if that national American drama were already an accomplished fact, I fear you would not so readily have welcomed my plays for the last twenty-four years, and I fear you would not care to listen to me now.

If we throw one sweeping glance over the whole past history of the drama, we are deeply impressed by two main, commanding features. The first of these is the perennial and universal existence of the dramatic instinct, always and everywhere seeking expression, always and everywhere pushing up its shoots into the national life. Often repressed, often debased, often childish, often

vulgar, often obscene, often the emptiest, silliest bauble ; formless ; ribald ; violent ; grotesque ; a feast of indecencies, or a feast of horrors, there has yet rarely been a time, or a country, where some kind of drama has not been fitfully and precariously struggling into existence. That is the first main feature in the world's dramatic history. The second main feature is complementary. Twice in the past the drama has splendidly emerged, has seized, possessed, inflamed and interpreted the whole spirit of the nation, has become a supreme artistic achievement of the age and people. Twice it has thus emerged—once in Greece, and once in Elizabethan England. But a Frenchman would say that three times, and a Spaniard would claim that four times, in the world's history have there been great creative outbursts of drama. Well, we who possess Shakespeare will generously allow that there have been four such great creative outbursts, which have left standing these towering mountain ranges of drama for us to wonder at. France, in the seventeenth century, was the scene of the last of these great creative outbursts, and the incomparable Molière was the head and front of its glory.

This brings me to the purpose of my lecture, which is, indeed, to ask this practical question, "By what means can a worthy art of the drama be fostered and developed in America and England to-day?" I think we may best get an answer to this question by comparing the history and status of the drama in France and in England from the time of Molière down to the twentieth century—down to the modern drama of the day before yesterday.

Here I must beg time and space for a rather long, but quite relevant, parenthesis. No glance at any corner of the modern drama can leave out of sight the ominous figure of Ibsen. A great destroyer ; a great creator ; a great poet ; a great liberator ; in his later prose plays he has freed the European drama, not only from the

minor conventions of the stage, such as the perfunctory aside¹ and the perfunctory soliloquy, but from the deadlier bondage of sentimentality, of one-eyed optimism, and sham morality. As there is no modern playwright who understands his craft that does not pay homage to Ibsen's technique, so there is no serious modern dramatist who has not been directly or indirectly influenced by him, and whose path has not been made clearer, and straighter, and easier by Ibsen's matchless veracity, courage and sincerity. Throughout these later plays, again and again he shows us how far more poignant and startling are inward spiritual situations and the secret surprises and suspenses of the soul, than outward physical situations and the traps and surprises of mechanical ingenuity.

Like all great artists, he is greatest, not where he is most realistic, but where he is most imaginative. It is true he does not reach through the middle zones of cloud and tempest: he does not attain those sunny heights of wisdom and serenity where Sophocles and Shakespeare and Goethe sit radiantly enthroned, watching all the turbid stream of human life as it flows a thousand leagues beneath their feet. Ibsen for the most part looms darkly through a blizzard, in a wilderness made still more bleak and desolate by the gray lava streams of corrosive irony that have poured from his crater. Yet by this very fact he becomes all the more representative of his age, and of the present cast and

¹ In discarding the "aside" in modern drama we have thrown away a most valuable and, at times, a most necessary convention. Let any one glance at the "asides" of Sir John Brute in *The Provoked Wife*, and he will see what a splendid instrument of rich comedy the "aside" may become. How are we as spectators to know what one character on the stage thinks of the situation and of the other characters, unless he tells us; or unless he conveys it by facial play and gestures which are the equivalent of an "aside"? The "aside" is therefore as legitimate a convention of drama as the removal of the fourth wall. More and more the English modern drama seems to be sacrificing everything to the mean ambition of presenting an exact photograph of real life (*October* 1912).

drift of European thought and philosophy. His generation has heard and received his insistent new gospel, "Live your own life!" But human hearts will always long for that strain of higher mood which we seem to remember, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

Ibsen is a citizen of a small country; this gives him many signal advantages, and some monstrous disadvantages. If his eyes avert their ken from half of human life, yet his vision is the more keen and strenuous for the half that lies before them. If he is a sour and shabby courtier to beauty, he is never a traitor to truth. He will never be surpassed in his angry scorn for lies. He has great fascination, but little charm. Joyous youth will never hobnob with him. For happy lovers, he grows no sweet forget-me-nots. The poor in spirit, he crushes. They who have rooted themselves at ease in the rank soil of modern commercialism, shudder at him, as a weed at the ploughshare, as a cancer at the knife. For two-thirds of human kind, he has only a command of self-contempt, and a sentence of despair and destruction. But the strong, he fortifies: the steadfast, he establishes: he is a scourge to slaves, but for them that are free, he enlarges the bounds of freedom. They honour him who honour the truth, and they welcome him who welcome the growl of the thunder and the dart of the lightning rather than stagnancy and miasma and the fitful shimmer that dances round corruption. A test of Ibsen's quality is supplied by the characters of the men who have most hated and vilified him. Some tribute may perhaps be offered, belated, but I hope not too late, by those whom his tense and shattering genius has at length conquered, and brought to own with great regret that they have in part misjudged, in part under-estimated him. He will long stand forth, a frowning landmark in the domain of the drama.

But, at present, Ibsen, by his circumstances, by his

character, by the nature of his genius, by the language he wrote in, abides a solitary figure ; and, though he has alarmed and shifted the whole modern drama, he stands mainly apart from it. And that we may get an answer to my primary question, "How can we foster and develop a worthy art of the drama in America and England to-day?" I must take you back to a comparison of the history of the drama in England and France, during the last two hundred and fifty years.

Let us look at England first. Immediately after Molière we have Dryden, and the brilliant and corrupt Restoration Comedy, largely drawing its inspiration from France and Molière. But our leading Restoration dramatists had not the immense advantage of Molière's practical acquaintance with the theatre ; and their plays, compared with Molière's, are badly and loosely constructed. Further, there is a profound, instinctive, all-pervasive morality in Molière. Molière's morality is sure, intrinsic, inevitable ; like Dante's, like Nature's morality. Our English Restoration Comedy is arid, heartless, degrading ; essentially mischievous, corrupt and depraved. Our love for Charles Lamb must not for a moment tempt us to accept his ingenious and audacious excuse for Restoration Comedy. We will not withdraw our censure from these Restoration heroes and heroines on the curious plea that they are fairy rakes and harlots living in fairy lands of cuckoldry ; in spite of Charles Lamb we will, if you please, very heartily and wholesomely condemn them, and feel all the better and more self-righteous for having done it.

Our Restoration Comedy, then, has vanished from our stage, because of its bad construction and loose morality ; more, I fear, because of its bad construction than of its loose morality. But though the Restoration Comedy no longer holds our stage, the splendour of its wit, and the vividness of its portraiture of town life ensure it a lasting place in English literature.

Since the Restoration Comedy, what place has the English drama held in English literature?

I was dining the other night with a book-collecting friend. He brought out first editions of "The Rivals," "The School for Scandal," and "She Stoops to Conquer." "There!" he exclaimed, "that's all the harvest of your English drama for the last two hundred years." Those three little volumes were all that a wealthy collector thought worthy to secure of the dramatic art of the Anglo-Saxon race in the past two hundred years—that Anglo-Saxon race which during that same two hundred years has held sovereign sway and masterdom in literature, in science, and in arms; which once held the sovereignty of the world in drama; a race of restless and inexhaustible achievement in almost every field; a race of action, and therefore essentially a dramatic race; a race whose artistic instincts would irresistibly find their natural and triumphant outlet on the stage. And in two hundred years all that the Anglo-Saxon race has produced of drama worthy to be preserved as literature is contained in those three tiny volumes. Why have we made such a beggarly mess of our drama?

Now if we turn from England to France, and survey the French theatre and the French drama, we shall find that there has been an almost continuous stream of great writers for the stage from Molière onwards to the present time. In the seventeenth century, Molière stands not only at the head of the French drama, but also at the head of French literature; holding the same relative place as did Shakespeare in England half a century earlier. If France were asked, "Who of your sons since Molière dare claim the garland of eternal and universal renown? Who in your later days is fit to stand in the circle of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespear, Milton, and Goethe?"—if France were asked that question, I suppose she could send in the names of two candidates only—Voltaire and Victor Hugo. But these, her two most famous men of letters in the eighteenth

and in the nineteenth centuries, were also her leading playwrights. As Molière in his century headed both literature and drama, so do Voltaire and Victor Hugo in theirs. But what a crowd of illustrious companions swarm round these great men. Look down the long list of them—Regnard, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, Dumas, Alfred de Musset, Casimir Delavigne, Dumas fils, Augier, Labiche, not to mention half-a-dozen living writers who are yearly throwing out powerful dramas dealing faithfully, sincerely, and searchingly with the vital characters, scenes, and issues of our modern social life. Take the long list of French writers of the first rank, and you will scarcely find one who has not been more or less successful on the stage. The French theatre has not been merely in constant touch with French literature; the French theatre and French literature have been wedded to each other for the last two hundred years, bone of one bone and flesh of one flesh. Every play by a leading French playwright is not only eagerly discussed and judged in the theatre; it is immediately published and eagerly discussed and judged as literature. A year or two ago, I remember taking up at a little wayside French bookstall a copy of the two hundred and eightieth thousand of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Further, during those two centuries, there has been a constant method of training actors and actresses. Acting is known to be a great art in France. The all-round performance of a strong emotional play in Paris is incomparably above the all-round performance of a strong emotional play in London; while the exhibition of quite amateur performers in leading parts, such as is not rarely seen on a London stage, would be a thing disgraceful or impossible in any leading city of France, to say nothing of Paris.

Again, in France the Drama is reckoned as a fine art, and is judged on that level; that is, as a means of providing amusement by the representation and interpretation of life. The French are a nation of cultivated

playgoers, alert to seize the finest shades of the actor's and the author's meaning. In England, the great mass of playgoers have lost all sense that the drama is the art of representing life, and go to the theatre mainly to be awed by scenery, or to be tickled by funny antics and songs and dances that have no relation to life, and merely provide a means of wasting the evening in entertainments that are frequently not far removed from idiocy.

If the English drama for two hundred years makes a beggarly show when looked at by itself, how abject and meagre and utterly despicable does it appear when compared with the drama of France in the same period. Once more we are brought round to the same question, "What are the causes of the present pitiable condition of the Anglo-American drama to-day?" Again I claim that the Anglo-American race is naturally and instinctively a dramatic race; a race of action; a race fitted for great exploits on the outer and larger stage of the world's history, and also for great exploits on the inner and smaller stage of the theatre. We have proved our mettle on both stages. We hold the world's prize for drama. Why then are we so far to seek? Why are we lagging behindhand in this our own native art of the drama, when by right we should have the other nations at our heels? How is it that these three poor thin volumes of plays are all that we have to show for two hundred years; while of living, serious, operative, modern drama to-day America and England have barely a fragment that will stand the final test of a quiet hour in the study?

The fundamental reason is to be found in the character of our race. We are a dramatic race: we are also a deeply religious race. Religion easily runs riot to fear and meanness and madness, and builds abominable hells in its panic. After the mellow pomp of the Elizabethan age, religion ran riot in England. We owe the imbecility and paralysis of our drama to-day to the

insane rage of Puritanism that would see nothing in the theatre but a horrible, unholy thing to be crushed and stamped out of existence. Let our Puritan friends ask themselves how far their creed is responsible, by the natural and inevitable law of reaction, for the corruption of the national drama at the Restoration, and for its pitiable condition ever since. The feeling of horror and fright of the theatre, engendered at the Restoration, although it has largely died away, is still prevalent and operative among religious classes in England and America. It has muddled and stupefied our drama, and has degraded it from the rank of a fine art to the rank of a frivolous and silly form of popular entertainment.

I have pointed out what I believe to be the underlying cause of the intellectual degradation of the Anglo-American drama to-day. But, attendant on this primary cause, are those other secondary and resultant causes and signs of degradation which we have glanced at in comparing the English and French drama. I will repeat them in the order of their importance.

(1) The divorce of the English drama from English literature, of which it is indeed the highest and most difficult form, and of which it should be chief ornament. Accompanying this divorce of literature and the drama is the contempt of English men of letters and literary critics for the theatre; their utter ignorance of the difficulties of the modern dramatist; their refusal to recognize the modern drama as literature, which refusal again reacts upon the dramatist, and tends to lower the quality of his work, inasmuch as he is left without encouragement, and without any appeal to high standards of literature and good taste.

(2) The general absence from the English Theatre and from modern English plays of any sane, consistent, or intelligible ideas about morality; so that, while the inanities and indecencies of musical comedy are sniggered at and applauded, the deepest permanent passions of men and women are tabooed, and the serious dramatist

is bidden to keep his characters well within the compass of that system of morality which is practised amongst wax dolls.

(3) The divorce of the English drama from its sister arts; its deposition [from any assured place in the intellectual and artistic life of the nation.

(4) The absorption of the English drama into popular amusement; the absence of any high standard whereby to judge acting or plays; the absence of all great traditions; the absence of all pride in the drama as a fine, and humane, and dignified art.

(5) The want of a training school for actors—the want of any means for giving promising novices a constant practice in varied rôles, so that they may gradually acquire a sure grip of their art, and make the best of their natural gifts; and so that the author may have a sufficient supply of competent actors to interpret his characters in such a way that his play may be seen to advantage.

(6) The elevation of incompetent actors and actresses into false positions as stars; whereby, in the dearth of any high general level of experienced and competent all-round acting, the possessor of a pretty face or a fine physique is able to dominate the situation, and to rule what plays shall be produced, and how they shall be cast and mounted; the general lack of all interest in the play, or in the author's study of life and character, apart from their being the vehicle for the star actor.

(7) A widely-spread dependence upon translations and adaptations of foreign plays, inasmuch as they can be bought at a cheap rate, and, in the absence of any general care or knowledge as to what a national drama should be, are just as likely to provide the leading actor with a personal and pecuniary success, while they also largely set him free from all obligations to that most objectionable and interfering person, the author.

Now all these discouraging symptoms and conditions of our modern drama which I have glanced at are

indeed, only different aspects of the same facts ; they are inextricably related to each other ; many of them are woven all of a piece with each other, and with that Puritan horror of the theatre which I believe has been the cardinal reason, why neither America nor England has to-day an art of the drama at all worthy the dignity, the resources, and the self-respect of a great nation. I hope you will not think I have given an ill-natured or exaggerated sketch of the present condition of the Anglo-American drama. If I have wounded your susceptibilities, I have done it with the good intention of rendering you some small help in your laudable design of building up a great national school of American drama.

Now, if I have struck my finger on the place in pointing to the religious dread of the theatre, and the consequent abstention from it of the best and soundest elements of our nations—if I have traced our difficulties and shortcomings to their true source, it is clear that before we can hope for any signal advance in dramatic art, we must win over a large body of public opinion to our views.

In their attitude towards the theatre and the drama, we may, I think, make a rough division of the Anglo-American public into three classes. Both in England and in America we have large masses, indeed millions, of mere amusement seekers, newly enfranchised from the prison house of Puritanism ; eager to enjoy themselves at the theatre in the easiest way ; without traditions, without any real judgment of plays or acting ; mere children, with no care or thought beyond the delight of the moment in finding themselves in a wonder house where impossibly heroic and self-sacrificing persons make love and do prodigious deeds, and marry and live happily ever afterwards ; or in a funny house where funny people do all sorts of funny things. These form the great bulk, I think, of American and English playgoers. Then we have a large class of moderate,

reasonable, respectable people, who go to the theatre occasionally, but with some feeling of discomfort at having done a frivolous, if not a wicked thing; who are not actively hostile to the drama perhaps, but who are quite indifferent to its higher development and to its elevation into a fine art. This class contains many refined, cultivated people—that is, they seem to be cultivated and refined in all subjects except the drama. It is a constant puzzle to me why men and women whose brains seem to be thoroughly developed in every other respect should suddenly drop to the mental range of children of five the moment they think and speak about the drama.

Again, we have a third class containing some of the soundest and best elements of the Anglo-Saxon race: a rapidly diminishing class perhaps, but still very influential, very respectable, very much to be regarded, and consulted, and feared. And this influential religious class is in more or less active hostility to the theatre, and to the drama, and to everything and everybody connected therewith. We may call these three classes respectively the amusement-seeking class; the moderate, reasonable, indifferent class; the hostile, religious class. This is the very roughest and loosest division, and of course all these classes blend and shade into each other without any rigid line of distinction. I do not know how actively hostile to the drama are the religious elements in American society. I am told that while the religious prejudice against the theatre is dying away in the eastern sea-board states, it is still very potent and aggressive in the west. But a story that was told me before leaving England will, I think, convince you that this religious prejudice is still a terrible hindrance to the highest development of your drama. There is nothing in which Americans can more legitimately take pride than in the magnificent public spirit shown by their wealthy citizens. Englishmen stand agape and envious at the large sums given by your millionaires

to advance and endow all kinds of scientific, artistic and social enterprises. I am told that a very large amount was designed by a wealthy American to found and endow a national American theatre on a most lavish scale; but he was persuaded by a religious friend to hold his hand and shut his pocket, because of the evil that a national theatre might work in your midst. Consider what mischief was done to the whole American community by the frustration of that most wise, most humane, most benevolent scheme! Consider how many hundreds of thousands of your fellow-citizens may in consequence waste their evenings in empty frivolity when they might have been drawn to Shakespeare, or, to some thoughtful representation of your own life. Therefore we must still count that the hostile religious spirit is very active and potent on your side of the Atlantic, as upon ours. It everywhere sets up a current of ill-will and ill-nature towards the drama throughout the two entire nations: it everywhere stimulates opposition to the theatre: it keeps alive prejudices that otherwise would have died down two hundred years ago: it has been, in my opinion, the one great obstacle to the rise and development of a serious, dignified, national art of the drama. I fear there will always be a crew of unwholesome, religious fanatics in America and England who will be doomed from their birth to be hostile to the drama. It is useless to argue with them. Our climate breeds them, at least the English climate does. You cannot argue the jaundice out of a man, and advise him that it is foolish to have a sickly green complexion. He needs something far more drastic than advice and argument. We must leave the fanatics to rave against the theatre, and against all art and beauty.

But among this actively hostile religious class, and also among the moderate, reasonable, indifferent class, there must be thousands who, having been nurtured to regard the theatre as frivolous and empty and evil,

have adopted the ideas current around them, and have never taken the trouble to examine their stock prejudices against the drama, and to inquire whether there is any ground for them. To this large body of American and English citizens; to the heads and leaders of all those religious sects in America and England who are now hostile to the drama; and especially to that large allied class of influential, educated men in both countries, who, if not actively hostile, are supercilious, and cold, and indifferent, and blind to the aims and possibilities of this fine art—to all these citizens representing the best and soundest elements in the Anglo-American race, we may make a strong and friendly appeal.

“Brother Puritans, Brother Pharisees, the dramatic instinct is ineradicable, inexhaustible: it is entwined with all the roots of our nature; you may watch its incessant activity in your own children; almost every moment of the day they are acting some little play; as we grow up and strengthen, this dramatic instinct grows up and strengthens in us; as our shadow, it clings to us; we cannot escape from it; we cannot help re-picturing to ourselves some copy of this strange, eventful history of ours; this strange, earthly life of ours throws everywhere around us and within us reflections and re-reflections of itself; we act it over and over again in the chambers of imagery, and in dreams, and on the silent secret stage of our own soul. When some master dramatist takes these reflections, and combines them, and shapes them into a play for us, very Nature herself is behind him, working through him for our welfare. So rigidly economical, so zealously frugal is she, that what is at first a mere impulse to play, a mere impulse to masquerade and escape from life—this idle pastime she transforms and glorifies into a masterpiece of wisdom and beauty; it becomes our dear and lovable guide in the great business and conduct of life. This is what she did for us in Shakespeare and Molière. Consider the utility of the theatre,

you practical Americans and Englishmen! You have noticed cats teaching their kittens to play at catching mice. But this is their great business and duty in after life. You have noticed puppies pretending to hunt, and shake, and kill game. But this is their great business and duty in after life. That is what all children and young things do. They play at their father's business. So their play time is not wasted, but is indeed a wise, amusing way of preparing for life. So Nature teaches us, her children, to play at life in theatre, that we may carelessly and easily learn the great rules of conduct; that we may become insensibly instructed in the great art of living well; insensibly infected with a hatred for things base and ungentle and foul; insensibly infected with a passion for whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report.

“This, then, is the use of the theatre; that men may learn the great rules of life and conduct in the guise of a play; learn them, not formally and didactically, as they learn in school and in church, but pleasantly, insensibly, spontaneously, and oftentimes, believe me, with a more assured and lasting result in manners and conduct. Is not that a wise form of amusement? Ought not every good citizen to foster and encourage it? Then why, Brother Puritans, why, Brother Pharisees, are you found in such bitter opposition to it? If you are the veritable salt of the earth, as by your demeanour we seem to sniff, and as by this appeal we are willing to allow—if you are the veritable salt of the earth, where can you exhale your savour to better effect than in the theatres of your native land? Come amongst us, and brace and strengthen us: incidentally we may sweeten, and humanize you, and give you a larger outlook upon life.

“Look at the vast population of our great cities crowding more into our theatres, demanding there to be given some kind of representation of life, some form of play. You cannot quench that demand. During the

next generation, hundreds of theatres will be opened all over America and England. If you abstain from visiting those theatres, you will not close them. Millions of your countrymen, the vast masses, will still frequent them. The effect of your absence, and of your discountenance, will merely be to lower the moral and intellectual standard of the plays that will then be given. Will you never learn the lesson of the English Restoration, that when the best and most serious classes of the nation detest and defame their theatre, it instantly justifies their abuse and becomes indeed a scandal and a source of corruption? Many of you already put Shakespeare next to the Bible, as the guide and inspirer of our race. Why then do you despise his calling, and vilify his disciples, and misunderstand his art? Do you not see that this amusement, which you neglect and flout and decry, is more than an amusement: is indeed at once the finest and the most popular of all the arts, with an immense influence on the daily lives of our fellow-citizens? Help us, then, to organize and endow this fine art in all the cities of our Anglo-American race, wherever our common tongue is spoken, from London to San Francisco. Help us to establish it in the esteem and affections of our fellow-countrymen, as the measure of our advance in humanity and civilization, and in that knowledge of ourselves which is the end and flower of all education."

Some such appeal may, I think, be made to the more seriously minded of our countrymen on both sides the Atlantic. I have given it great prominence in these lectures, because I feel that before we begin to build, we need to clear the ground of the rank growths of prejudice and Puritan hatred which still choke the drama. Both in England and America we seem to be waiting for some great national impulse, some word of command for a general forward movement towards a creative school of drama. In spite of many discouragements and humiliations during the last ten or twelve

years ; in spite of the hatred of the religious world, the indifference and contempt of the educated and artistic classes, the debased frivolity of the multitude, the zealous envy and rage of those whose ignoble trade and daily bread it is to keep the drama on a degraded level—in spite of all these hindrances, I believe that word of command will be spoken, and that we shall march to it. But if there is to be any stability and permanence in the movement, it must be a national one. We must engage the sympathies and co-operation of all classes. We have many schisms and sects in religion : let us have none in the drama.

I have taken much time, and, I fear, I have taxed your patience in thus clearing the ground. But having cleared the ground, we can begin to lay the corner stones. I have already told you what seem to me to be the corner stones of any school of drama, worthy to be called national in such countries as America and England. Perhaps I may here repeat them in the order of their importance. They are these:—

(1) The recognition of the drama as the highest and most difficult form of literature: the establishment of definite and continuous relations between the drama and literature.

(2) The acknowledged right of the dramatist to deal with the serious problems of life, with the passions of men and women in the spirit of the broad, wise, sane, searching morality of the Bible and Shakespeare: his release from the hypocritical fiction that his fellow creatures are large wax dolls, stuffed with the sawdust of sentimentality and impossible self-sacrifice. To sum up, the establishment of definite and continuous relations between the drama and morality.

(3) The severance of the drama from popular entertainment: the recognition of it as a fine art which, though its lower ranges must always compound with mere popular entertainment, and be confused with it, is yet essentially something different from popular

entertainment, transcends it, and in its higher ranges is in marked and eternal antagonism to popular entertainment. To sum up, the establishment of definite and continuous relations between the drama and the sister arts.

(4) The establishment of those relations between actor and author which shall best aid the development of the drama: the recognition by the public that there is an art of the drama as well as an art of acting: the assignment of their due place, and functions, and opportunities to each: the breaking down, so far as may be possible, of the present deadening system of long runs: the provision of training schools for actors in order that they may get constant practice and experience in varied rôles, so that the auxiliary arts of the drama and the theatre may keep pace and tune with each other; so that the art of acting may not languish from lack of such new plays as may give great opportunities to great actors; and so that the art of the drama may not languish from the lack of emotional and intellectual actors. To sum up, the establishment of rigidly definite relations and well-marked boundaries between the art of the drama and the art of acting, to the benefit and advancement of both actor and author.

These seem to me to be the four corner stones upon which we must build, if we are ever to raise, in England and America, an art of the drama with any real influence, and import, and dignity in Anglo-American civilization.

But each of these four divisions of the drama demands consideration and examination by itself.

Especially I should have liked to speak in this place upon the modern drama and literature. But I felt that the clearing of the ground was of primary importance. And now that I have given so much time to that troublesome operation, I fear you have been thinking that in Harvard at least the ground has been already cleared, and the first corner stone, the corner stone that is to bind together literature and the modern drama, has been already laid by Professor Baker.

Well, that is a most encouraging fact which I gladly recognize and acclaim.

After years of unsuccessful endeavour to get our English playgoers to read and examine in the study the plays that had delighted them on the stage, I one day received from Professor Baker a letter to the effect that, as Professor of English literature, he had given his Harvard students a course of modern English plays. Of all the many encouragements and rewards that I have received in England and America, I value most the recognition that was conveyed in that letter. It was a bold and original action on Professor Baker's part. He must have met with considerable opposition, and perhaps some derision. I wonder what Oxford would say if it were suggested to her that modern English plays should form a part of her teaching. Oxford might rouse herself for a moment if some bold messenger dare knock at her gates on such an errand, and her reply would be, "Aeschylus I know, and Sophocles and Euripides I know, but who are ye?"

"Representatives of the modern drama."

"Modern drama? We have heard of Shakespeare and some Elizabethan dramatists, and we allow a footing to Molière and the Restoration writers of comedy. They represent the modern drama here."

"No! No! Not the drama of three centuries ago, and of a vanished civilization, but the drama of to-day, the modern drama."

"There is no modern drama," Oxford would sternly reply.

"Yes! Yes! Our plays run for hundreds of nights and consume a vast quantity of the winter leisure of our city millions, and help to fill the empty spaces in their skulls where their brains ought to be."

"Blank verse?"

"No—plain prose."

"Polished English prose?" Oxford would ask.

"No. Unfortunately, the English and American

public have abandoned for the present the habit of speaking in blank verse, or even in polished prose; and for the most part talk a slovenly, slangy shorthand which, faithfully taken down, reads something like a sporting man's telegram, or snippets of dialogue from a cheap comic paper. If we were to put into the mouths of our characters a dignified, resounding prose, with finely balanced cadences, we should be told we were stilted and unnatural. So we put into the mouths of our characters the actual phrases of the street and the drawing-room, and we are scorned for not being men of letters and writing literature."

"But *are* you men of letters? *Do* you write literature?" Oxford would solemnly demand.

"Well, scarcely, at present," we could only stammer.

"Then why should Oxford unloose her hoary dignity and condescend to such as you?"

"We trusted that Oxford, as the centre of English learning and education, might aid us to rescue the English drama from chaos and imbecility; and, incidentally, help us to set a standard of manners and conversation all over the English-speaking world."

"This smacks to me of elevating the masses, and never will I unbend my reverend energies to such revolting drudgery. The masses! The masses! Let them darken in labour and pain without my gates! I am the home of lost causes and decaying superstitions! What concern have I, Oxford, with the masses?"

"But it isn't merely the masses. You must have noticed how all classes of society regard our modern drama—"

"Modern drama!" Oxford would thunder. "All things modern I abhor. Has not my old age been vexed and shaken enough by modern science? Modern drama, forsooth! There is no modern drama! Away! You are raw! You are crude! You are vulgar! I suspect you are improper! And I allow none but classic improprieties within my hallowed cloisters! Away, you

plebeians! You mountebanks! You interlopers! Profane not my gray precincts with your uncouth diction! Avaunt, and quit my sight! Your blood is warm! Your bones are full of the marrow of youth! Your eyes flash back the sunlight! You are alive! And I suffer none but the dead to enter here!"

Thus would Oxford answer, I fear, and let fall the massive portcullis of her learning, shutting us out for ever, while she goes dreaming on amongst her dreaming spires.

But Harvard has welcomed us. Harvard has welcomed us, and the other American Universities have also opened their doors. I have said that Professor Baker did a notable and courageous thing in recognizing the modern English drama at Harvard. I believe he also did a wise and far-seeing thing, a deed that may return in future days, like a happy harvestman bringing sheaves of ripe and benign consequences to American art and civilization.

When I was in America last autumn after an absence of twenty years, I could not help feeling that I was in the presence of immense forces that are gradually shifting the foundations, and changing the drift of Anglo-American civilization. I could not help feeling that the sceptre of material prosperity is slipping from our hands into your vigorous, remorseless grasp. I could not help dreading that in a few generations the centre and seat of whatever curious system of Anglo-American civilization may then be current, will be irrevocably fixed on this side the Atlantic. That cannot be other than a saddening chilling thought to an Englishman who loves his country. I cannot but think it will bring some sympathetic regret to many Americans. Yet, after all, I suppose your chief feeling will be one of pride and triumph in your young nation, and you will chant over us your Emerson's ringing notes :

"The lord is the peasant that was,
The peasant the lord that shall be :
The lord is hay, the peasant grass,
One dry, one the living tree."

But the Empire of Mammon sucks after it other empires; perhaps in our modern commercial world it will suck after it all other empires, all arts, all interests, all responsibilities, all leaderships. Yet we must still trust that in days to come, as in days of old, it will not be the sceptre of material prosperity that will finally hold sway over the earth. Granted that, in a short time as reckoned by the life of nations, we shall have to hand over to you, with what grace we may, the sceptre of material prosperity, shall we not still hold that other magic wand, shadowy, invisible, but more compulsive than sceptres of gold or iron—the sceptre of literary, intellectual and artistic dominion? Or will you wrest that also from us?

May we not rather hope to see both nations united in a great assay to build one common monument of graceful, wise, beautiful, dignified, human existence on both sides of the Atlantic? Your nation has, what all young nations have, what perhaps England is losing; the power to be moved by ideas; and that divine resilient quality of youth, the power to be stirred and frenzied by ideals. If a guest whom you have honoured so much, may whisper his most fervent wishes for your country, he would say, "As you vie with us in friendly games and contests of bodily strength, may you more resolutely vie with us for the mastership in art and in the ornament of life; build statelier homes, nobler cities, and more aspiring temples than we have built; let your lives be fuller of meaning and purpose than ours have lately been; have the wisdom richly to endow and unceasingly to foster all the arts, and all that makes for majesty of life, and loftiness of character, rather than for material prosperity and comfort. Especially foster and honour this supreme art of Shakespeare's, so much neglected and misunderstood in both countries; endow it in all your cities; build dignified beautiful theatres free from degraded tawdry decorations; train your actors: reward your dramatists, sparingly with fees, but lavishly with

laurels; bid them dare to paint American life sanely, truthfully, searchingly, for you. Dare to see your life thus painted. Dare to let your drama ridicule and reprove your follies and vices and deformities. Dare to let it mock and whip, as well as amuse, you. Dare to let it be a faithful mirror. Make it one of your chief counsellors. Set it on the summit of your national esteem, for it will draw upwards all your national life and character. Like the gurgoyles of Notre Dame it will offer you shapes and images of human vice and foulness for your perpetual hate and avoidance; like the statuary of the Parthenon it will offer you shapes and images of human loveliness and wisdom for your perpetual desire and admiration.

III

LITERATURE AND THE MODERN DRAMA

A lecture delivered to Yale University on the evening of Monday, November 5th, 1906. Chairman, President Hadley.

IN an introductory lecture I gave last week at Harvard, I tried to clear the ground for laying the corner stones of a National Anglo-American drama. I tried to justify the phrase "national Anglo-American drama" by pointing out that for many years past the same ranges of poetic and modern drama have been common ground to both nations; and that the highest talent in acting had been equally at the service of both nations, and had been equally at home on both sides of the Atlantic. I asked leave to assume provisionally that America and England are for the present twin nations in the affairs of the drama. If, however, you prefer that I should use the phrase "*international* Anglo-American drama," I will immediately substitute it. Or if you wish me to use the phrase "national Americo-Anglian drama," then I can only whisper with a chastened softened air that Americo-Anglian may be the current adjective in generations to come.

Perhaps at the outset you may be inclined to say that if you need to be instructed in the duty, may I say? of building up a national American drama, you would rather be instructed by an American citizen. Let me declare that I am heartily in sympathy with the feeling that would prompt you to make such a remark. Let me disclaim any wish to intrude upon a province which you may justly feel is especially the domain of your own

playwrights. But I have received so much kindness from American dramatists, that I think I may beg them in the spirit of the warmest comradeship to allow me to speak here on our common art without the uncomfortable feeling on either side that I am a meddling foreigner. For the general body of American playgoers, I can only say that I should ill repay the most generous welcome that America has given my work if I stood here in any controversial spirit to dispute at the table of my hosts, to arraign and to argue where I should only return thanks.

I stand here the most grateful guest, the most grateful servant of American playgoers. But sometimes servants are consulted in those affairs which are left in their charge. And sometimes a good servant may be pardoned if he ventures to offer an opinion on his own account. Let me liken myself to a practical clockmaker, who has been employed for a quarter of a century to tinker the clock of the Anglo-American drama. Now, on both sides of the Atlantic there have lately been very uneasy suspicions and complaints that the clock does not go. If you dispute that statement, and point to the great material prosperity of our theatres, the crowded houses, the long runs, the enormous salaries obtained by actors, I shall still affirm that although the clock has occasional spasmodic movements, and sometimes strikes the right hour, yet it does not keep constant time, or anything like constant time. It does not go. I shall point out that England and America—the most wealthy nations in the world—have nothing that can by any stretch of charity be called a national drama. We have many arts, and institutions, and charities in which we may justly take some pride. In the drama itself we have many individual performers and performances, and some plays that may deservedly be praised. But is there a single Englishman or American, above the mental capacity of a parrot, who takes a pride in his country's drama as a whole; as an organized, dignified art; as something of a different

nature, and on a different level from mere casual haphazard entertainment? If such an educated Englishman or educated American exists I have never met him. I shall be glad if he will declare himself and prove me to be wrong. Have you ever heard an educated American or Englishman express such a feeling? But why should not England and America have a national drama which can be regarded with pride and affection by their citizens?

It is at this juncture that perhaps you will allow an old servant, whom you have employed to tinker the dramatic clock, to give you his opinion why it does not go. This then is my excuse for standing here. Any one who owns a watch can easily see that it does not keep time; but it is only a practical watchmaker who knows the business of every cog and the mystery of every spring, that can explain to you, the benevolent owner of the watch, why it does not go.

In my introductory lecture at Harvard, I tried to show that any possible national school of Anglo-American drama must be built upon these four corner stones:

The establishment of right and definite and continuous relations between the drama and literature; between the drama and morality; between the drama and popular entertainment; between the drama and the theatre.

I purpose in this lecture to deal with the relations that exist, or rather with the relations that do not exist, between literature and the drama in America and England. Here I may perhaps call your attention to a suggestive and well-reasoned paper by Mr. Brander Matthews on the relations of the drama to literature. He truly points out that the art of the drama is not coincident with literature, that though it sometimes overlaps literature, it must not be judged solely by the same rules as a piece of literature. Mr. Brander Matthews covers widely different ground in that paper from the ground I propose to take you over to-night.

For one thing, he establishes a striking likeness between the art of the drama and the art of oratory, inasmuch as their immediate appeal is to a crowd, and if that immediate appeal is lost—all is lost. He quotes with approval from the preface by Dumas fils to the "Père Prodigue": "A dramatic work should always be written as though it was only to be read. . . . The spectator gives it vogue: The reader makes it durable." Mr. Brander Matthews sums up the whole matter in one pregnant sentence: "Only literature is permanent." That is a great saying which every American and English playwright should print on the inside cover of his writing-case.

Now, if I were to ask you "What are the present relations between American drama and American literature? How many American plays are in active circulation amongst you, so that on reading them over you can put your finger on the fine passages that amused you or stirred you when you saw them acted? How often do you go to a theatre, and the next day take from the library shelf the play of the previous evening, and chew the cud of the author's wisdom, or passion, or satire, as a Frenchman can chew the cud of a living French dramatist, as a Norwegian can chew the cud of his modern Ibsen?"—if I were to ask you these questions you would reply: "We are a young nation; we are still partly in the leading strings of England in matters of art and literature: we have scarcely had time to build our house, much less to decorate it. Our art, and our literature, and our drama are at present in the nebulous state, scarcely even in the fluid, certainly not in the final congealed, concrete state. It is not fair to us to ask such a question as: "What is the relation between American literature and the American drama?" Very well, I won't ask it. In place of that question, I will ask another: "Seeing that only literature is permanent, seeing that all plays that are not literature, however amusing or exciting or popular, must quickly perish; nay, did really

perish before they were born; seeing that it is the literary quality which keeps fresh and vital and operative upon our stage to-day, the plays of Shakespeare, Molière, Sheridan—how can a relation be established between literature and the modern acted drama in the theatres of America and England to-day?"

For, as we have seen, it is only by the establishment of this relation that Americans and Englishmen can have a national drama in which they can take a legitimate pride, or indeed a drama that is worth a single moment's discussion. I am sure it was with some such idea in your minds, the idea that the drama is worth earnest consideration, that it is of vast importance in your national economy, that it needs to be clarified from mere popular entertainment and set upon a permanent intellectual basis—it was with this idea that you invited me to speak to you about my art.

Now, if it would be unfair to ask: "What is the present relation between American literature and the American drama?" it would be satirical to ask: "What is the present relation between English literature and the English drama?"

Briefly, in England men of letters have mostly an open contempt for the modern drama, or at the best a supercilious indifference. They have also a careless notion that playwriting is an easy ignoble form of scribbling which makes much money. No notion could be more false or more fantastic with regard to any worthy play. English and American dramatists are greatly indebted to Mr. Brander Matthews for his constant affirmation that the drama is the most difficult, the most subtle, the most noble form of literature. I can only invite those who doubt his assertion to make the experiment. At the end of twenty years they will be inclined to agree with him.

If we mass together both our countries and ask what notion, or notions, the general body of Anglo-American playgoers have formed of the relations of the drama to

literature, I think we must own that for the most part they are in a very blessed state of child-like innocence about the whole matter. One very common cardinal notion, however, seems to possess playgoers on both sides the Atlantic. It is the notion that a costume play, a play whose scenes are laid anywhere, and at any time between the birth of Christ and 1840, does by that very fact acquire a literary merit, a literary distinction and profound significance which rank it immeasurably above the mere prose play of modern everyday life. It matters not whether the personages of the costume play talk blank verse, or a patchwork diction compounded from every literary and conversational style from Chaucer to a Whitechapel costermonger; to the great majority of playgoers the costume play brings that elevation of mind and feeling, that vague but gratifying sense of superiority which was felt by the Bourgeois Gentleman when he discovered that, without taking the least pains, he was a person of very considerable literary attainments. This feeling of awe in the presence of a costume play has persisted as long as I can remember. In my early playgoing days it was chiefly called forth by the blank verse plays of Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles. Leading actors played on alternative evenings, "Hamlet" and "The Hunchback"; "Othello" and "The Lady of Lyons"; "The Merchant of Venice" and "The Love Chase." Each item of the repertory equally aroused in the actor the sense of meritorious poetic achievement, and in the audience the sense of reverent, elevated, æsthetic delight. Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles have now retired from competition with Shakespeare. Who has taken their place in the repertory of leading actors? One or two plays of genuine poetic merit have been produced, have been cordially recognized, and have been played with some degree of success. It would, however, be rash to hope that they will keep a permanent hold of the stage.

Many costume pieces have been produced with

considerable success and profit. One or two of them have been really well written, and may claim to rank as literature. But for the most part, the costume pieces that are successful on our stage are very sorry pieces of fustian and artifice, and would not bear a moment's examination in print. Indeed, I fancy it is mainly the costume of the leading actor, his lofty tone, his imperial air, that persuade our good-natured playgoers that the ancillary literature of the play must needs be correspondingly sublime. When such very fine clothes are paraded, such heroic sentiments uttered, such gallant deeds done, such lavish, nay, such wasteful feats of self-sacrifice performed under our very eyes, I fear it shows a mean and churlish spirit to call for any examination of the author's diction, of the truth of his characterization, or indeed of the common-sense of his whole scheme.

I remember a scene in a West End London theatre that effectively showed to what extent an audience may be moved to a wild expression of approval by the assured tone and manner of the actor. A venerable old village clergyman came up to London and discovered his only son in an undesirable relationship with an undesirable lady. The old man was heartbroken, and used all the arguments of his profession to recall the boy to a sense of his duty to society. Having failed to move the young man, the white-haired old father at length revealed the fact that he, too, in his youth had formed a like undesirable attachment: "But," sternly declared the venerable old clergyman, "when honour called, I flung her off, and married your mother!" This atrocious sentiment was delivered with so much dignity and severity of moral conviction, that it called forth boundless applause night after night from the audience. And I do not doubt that our actors, by their elevated tone, manner and bearing, are largely responsible for the notion so widely prevalent amongst playgoers that a costume play must necessarily rank higher as

literature than the prose play of everyday modern life. Please do not suppose that I am bringing a sweeping charge of wilful deception against actors generally. In most cases their enthusiastic production of costume plays cannot be ascribed to any baser or other motive than an ignorance of what literature is. As a rule, actors honestly believe that some superior literary merit natively clings to a play that is not written in modern everyday prose, and that great artistic merit may be claimed for losing five or ten thousand pounds in producing a costume blank verse play. Oh, the vast sums of money that have been lost in exploiting such plays in the mischievous idea that they are "literary," and that the public taste is elevated by producing them! More than enough to establish and endow national theatres in England and America!

I will make the statement that in the matter of the permanent worth of plays, the public, without taking much thought or care about the matter, has on the whole a surer instinct and a higher taste than the actor. For with the actor, personal and ulterior considerations must often intrude and warp his judgment. The literary merit, the permanent worth of the play, must always, consciously or unconsciously, be a matter of secondary importance to the actor, so far as he has the true spirit and the rightful ambition of the actor within him. To deny this is to deny that human nature is human nature. "Have I the best part? Shall I score above everybody else in the cast? Shall I hold or better my starry position, or will it be taken from me?" Does any one deny that these must always be the chief considerations of the actor? Again, I tell him he is merely affirming that human nature is not human nature. It is quite right, and indeed it is most urgent for the success of his career, that a leading actor should make his own part his chief concern. But this first necessity of his position must always govern and colour and influence his choice, and sometimes

altogether distort his judgment of plays. The matter is of the greatest importance, but it may be more conveniently discussed when dealing with relations of the drama to the theatre.

I fear that sometimes a motive quite alien from a love of literature, or from mere ignorance of what literature is, decides a leading actor's choice of a play and moves him to give preference to a costume piece. Until quite recent years, our British Army clad its recruits in flaming scarlet, and thus gave them an unfair advantage over us mere civilians in the important matter of winning the hearts of their females. If the great Hebrew prophet's question, "Wherefore art thou red in thy apparel?" had been put to the young British soldier, he would have answered, "To sweetheart the nursemaids in the Park."

It is only within the last century that the European male has dropped the immemorial costume, common to him and to all male animals, birds, and insects from creation onwards, of outblazing and dominating his female by the splendour of his raiment, coat, skin, fur, or feathers. It is with great humiliation that a lover of the theatre must reluctantly confess that in the matter of male garments, as in matters intellectual, the British theatre tends to lag about a century behind date. For to ask a plain question—"Has all this costume bravery of the stage any higher, or any other, significance than the soldier's scarlet tunic, displayed before the worshipping nursemaid?"

You have two phrases in America, "Matinée girl" and "Matinée idol." We have not the phrases in England, but we have the corresponding personages. At a recent *matinée* given in an English city by one of our most deservedly popular stage heroes, it is credibly alleged that at the opening of the doors two hundred and seventy-nine ladies passed the pay-box. Then a single man appeared. But he was a curate. I do not think that any explanation can be offered of this incident

that would flatter the dramatic taste of the town, or, indeed, that concerns the drama at all. I think the only explanation that can be given of these matinée phenomena is to class them with the nursemaid and the soldier in the Park; except, indeed, that the nursemaid has this great advantage, or disadvantage—she does actually talk with her hero, and in many cases is made the veritable and unfortunate heroine of the story.

Now, I think I had better pause. I have made a mortal enemy of every matinée young lady and every matinée idol in England and America. I hasten to express my deep sorrow, and to make a bow of profound apology all round on both sides the Atlantic. Let me first try to win back a smile of goodwill from the matinée young lady and all her sisters; from those who form so large, so powerful, so desirable, so welcome a majority of many of our theatrical audiences in England and America. Let me take a grandfather's privilege and whisper a little confidential aside to the matinée young lady. "My dear granddaughter, never will I be so foolish as to bring this tiresome art of the drama into competition with the great business, the fine art of love-making. I have claimed for the drama that it is the finest of all arts, but between ourselves I frankly own it sinks into insignificance beside your own natural art, which is truly, the oldest, the finest, the subtlest of all the arts. It is better to have 'a vermeil-tinctured lip' than a sound contempt for fustian blank verse; while the vastest literary possessions are a very drug compared with the possession of 'love-darting eyes and tresses like the morn.' Therefore, do not think that I am scolding you, or questioning your good taste in flocking to costume plays and in worshipping your matinée idols. But I would like you to recognize, and I would like those who direct your taste to recognize, that all this nursemaid and red soldier business is only very distantly and incidentally connected with the drama; while a confirmed indulgence in it, a belief in

it as actuality, is quite destructive of your enjoyment, or, indeed of your comprehension, of any serious drama whatever. I would say of all this costume flummery and fustian, what I so constantly say of popular entertainment, 'Enjoy it by all means, but recognize it for what it is. Separate it from your drama; that is, separate it in your own minds, when you are talking and thinking about it.' I do not ask or expect that it shall be separated on the boards of all our theatres, or in the words and business of all our plays. That is impossible. Even in Shakespeare's greatest tragedies there are occasional sops of popular entertainment thrown in; while in the most inane musical farce, in the most violent melodrama, in the most fallacious costume play, there are occasional strokes of wit and humour, occasional scenes of true pathos, occasional apparitions of dead heroes and clashing antagonists, which justify us in marking those particular passages respectively, as morsels of true comedy, true drama, or true tragedy. In all these instances it is a question of distinguishing what is senseless foolery, false sentiment, or cardboard armour; what is dross from what is gold."

With one little parting insinuation not to take costume stage heroes at too high a valuation, I again humbly apologize to the *matinée* young lady for having disturbed her maiden meditations with my most rude, my most impertinent remarks. But I hope I shall win her sometimes to give her attention to modern serious drama where superhuman heroism and self-sacrifice are not dealt out in wholesale quantities, but where human courage is sustained, and the æsthetic instincts gratified by the presentation of men and women, not as they impossibly ought to have been in the Middle Ages, but as they are to-day on the hard actual surface of this planet. I hope I have made my peace with the *matinée* young lady.

I have still to reckon with the redoubtable costume

hero myself. My first instinct is to hide myself, lest in a fit of justifiable anger he should challenge me to mortal combat by pistol, rapier, or broadsword: and upon discovering my caitiff terror of him, deal me one mortal thrust with the jewelled dagger that always hangs so opportunely at his jewelled belt. Perhaps, however, I had better take heart and face him with the simple request to ponder carefully what I have said. He will find that I have not uttered one word that can give offence to those actors who have a high esteem for their calling, not as it quaintly appoints them judges and arbiters of dramatic literature, or as it provides them with the means and opportunity of captivating the matinée young lady, but as it gives them the chance of fulfilling the actor's legitimate ambition, which, I humbly submit, is—to act. And it is noticeable that the greatest actors have a natural contempt for these matinée idol parts. Irving mainly eschewed them, and Edwin Booth is said to have detested playing a lover.

With regard to the costume play itself, I hope I have not shown ill-nature in dealing with a class of play with which, I confess, I have little sympathy. I will ask any one who questions my attitude towards the costume play to read carefully a recent essay by Mr. Brander Matthews on the Historical Novel. The arguments which Mr. Matthews advances with irresistible force and insight against the Historical Novel may be equally levelled against the Historical play. I beg all playwrights, intending to write costume or historical plays, to look once, nay twice, and yet once again at Mr. Brander Matthews' article.

There is a recurring tendency in every generation to write and to believe in the same kind of sublime nonsense that Cervantes laughed away more than three centuries ago. In truth, this return to fustian romance is perennial, and needs always to be laughed away. You have a not distant kinsman of Cervantes in America to-day who has laughed away much of this nonsense

from literature. Will not Mark Twain do your nascent American drama the service of clearing it at the start from sham heroes and sham heroics ?

I have given much time to point out what I do not mean by uniting the Anglo-American drama and literature. But doubtless students at Yale will tell me that Professor Phelps has taken good care to safeguard them from tumbling into the fallacy I have all this time been warning them against. You will say it is granted that the fustian costume play is not literature, and, therefore, cannot be permanent ; and, therefore, cannot be the type and foundation of any worthy school of drama. But what about the genuine poetic drama ? What about a school of modern blank-verse plays ?

Now, the drama being a highly conventional art, like sculpture, it is certain that its highest and most enduring achievements must always be wrought in the conventional language of poetry. The greatest things in nature or in life can never be expressed, or painted, or carved, or represented in exact imitation of real life, or in the spirit of modern realism. Least of all in sculpture and in the drama can they be so bodied forth. Therefore, the greatest examples of drama are poetic drama, and the highest schools of drama are, and must ever be, schools of poetic drama. But I think it would be a sad waste of time if England or America were to put forth any self-conscious efforts to found and sustain a school of poetic drama to-day ; or, indeed, to hope that by any possible process of manipulation or endowment the rising generation of English and American playwrights can with laboured forethought accomplish what the Elizabethans did naturally and spontaneously. Any living school of drama must be organically bound up with the daily lives of the people ; and it is useless for Englishmen or Americans to hope for much poetry in their drama till they have put a little more into their lives—that is, until the present reign of omnipotent, omnipresent commercialism is at an end.

The Elizabethan drama came at an exact moment in the life of the English language and of the English race; at an exact distance from the Renaissance and the Reformation: it was indirectly related to gorgeous dreams of empire; to great national ambitions; to a noble style in architecture, and to many other conditions which do not prevail to-day either in England or America. Neither the habits of life, nor the mould of thought, nor the period of development in either the English or the American language, is at all favourable to the prospects of the poetic drama on either side the Atlantic. Such examples of blank verse drama as obtain a fitful success on our modern stage, even those which contain scenes and lines of genuine poetry, seem to lack the freedom and bustle of healthy life; they have the uncomfortable air of men cased in armour, walking on stilts down Piccadilly or Broadway. They do not reflect or interpret our own lives, or any life; they reflect reflections of life from the stage, and from poetry and history.

I do not think there is the least hope of successfully founding and developing a school of poetic drama in England or America to-day. I shall be glad to find myself mistaken. I should like to think it possible that a body of Yale and Harvard students will prove me to be wholly wrong in my estimate of the dramatic harvest of the next two generations; but I can only discourage any American student who wishes to be a dramatist from using blank verse as his instrument. I discourage him, because I know that if there is in Yale or Harvard to-day any dauntless soul who is resolved to win the unattainable prize of poetic drama, he will most rightly despise and defy my counsel and go straight on to his goal. I can only wish him Godspeed on what seems to me a forlorn hope.

At present, then, only two reasons can be clearly discerned for producing modern poetic plays in England and America. They enable our actors to spend thousands of pounds in scenery and costumes, and by this means

to "elevate the drama" for the benefit of a populace who are to some extent judges of scenery and costumes, but who confessedly are no judges whatever of literature or poetry. They also have the further advantage, that they set free the dramatist from the ceaseless worry and drudgery of studying the lives and characters of the real living men and women around him. These seem to me the only reasons for cultivating the poetic drama in the present state of Anglo-American civilization.

Having then dashed your hopes of founding a living school of national drama upon the romantic costume play, and upon the imitation Elizabethan blank-verse play, you will ask me: "What kind of play is likely to fulfil the two necessary conditions, that is, to be at the same time operative and successful on our modern stage, and also to take permanent rank as literature? You have told us what to avoid. Now, tell us what to pursue."

I daresay many of you will remember a fine piece of true drama in the Pilgrim's Progress. I mean the trial scene of Christian and Faithful at Vanity Fair. Bunyan was a born dramatist. What is the hall-mark of the dramatist? What is the sure sign whereby you may always distinguish the dramatist from the humorist, the satirist, the farceur, the parodist, who also have their secondary places on the stage, and are welcome so far as they entertain us. The sure sign of the dramatist is the instant presentation and revelation of character in action, by means of bare dialogue. The dramatist makes his characters think, speak, act, live for themselves and for their own aims. The characters of the humorist, the satirist, the parodist, speak not their own words, but the author's; they are mere masks from behind which you always hear the author speaking; they walk the stage, not for their own aims, but for the author's. In the drama you should never hear the author speaking. If he wishes to speak *in propria persona* he should do as I have done to-night—gather round him a crowd of good-natured persons and lecture them, so that he may keep

silence in his own work. It is better for a dramatist to keep silence in his work than on his work.

Robert Burns was a potential dramatist. Read Holy Willie's Prayer—it is not Burns speaking, it is Holy Willie himself exuding the genuine oily drivel and brimstone of the conventicle.¹ Bunyan had a great dramatic faculty. All through his allegories you will find instances of most vivid and direct presentation of character in dialogue. If you will read the scene I have mentioned—the trial scene in *Vanity Fair*—you will find it a masterly little tragi-comic drama in miniature. The personages talk the exact talk of the day; short, apt, striking, colloquial sentences, nearly every one of which goes straight home, and would get a roar of laughter if the scene were played by accomplished comedians in our own theatre to-day. The truculent judge is a gem of character. This imperishable piece of dramatic literature was written, not by a man of letters, but by a travelling tinker. How many hundreds of laboured poetic dramas have been played and have been forgotten since that was written?

Bunyan got his material, not from library shelves, not from the past, but quick and alive from the world of living men around him. That is where you must begin to get your national American drama from, if you are to have a living drama at all. Perhaps you will think, "Then we have only to go out into the streets, into the hotels, into the stores, and write down what we see and hear, and make it up into a play." No, you will not get any very worthy play in that way. You will merely get a more or less interesting catalogue of facts and speeches—at best something akin to a photograph or a phonograph. All your materials must be sifted, and selected, and shaped, and transformed by the imagination into something rich and strange; into something impossible, yet most

¹ Stevenson says of Burns: "He was among the least impersonal of artists. Except in the 'Jolly Beggars' he shows no gleam of dramatic instinct."

credible, most veritable ; into something that never was and never will be, and is yet more real than anything that has ever happened on this earth. And the ore from which this golden thing of beauty is to be extracted is lying in apparently useless heaps at your very doors.

Recall the fine sentence from Mr. Brander Matthews that I quoted at the beginning of my lecture: "Only literature is permanent." If your drama is to live, it must be literature. But the same truth may be put in a converse form: "If your drama is truly alive, it will necessarily be literature." If you have faithfully and searchingly studied your fellow-citizens ; if you have selected from amongst them those characters that are interesting in themselves, and that also possess an enduring human interest ; if in studying these interesting personalities, you have severely selected from the mass of their sayings and doings and impulses, those words and deeds and tendencies which mark them at once as individuals and as types ; if you have then recast and reimagined all the materials ; if you have cunningly shaped them into a story of progressive and cumulative action ; if you have done all this, though you may not have used a single word but what is spoken in ordinary American intercourse to-day, I will venture to say that you have written a piece of live American literature—that is, you have written something that will not only be interesting on the boards of the theatre, but can be read with pleasure in your library, can be discussed, argued about, tasted and digested as literature. And it seems to me that this is the type of play you should start to write if you wish some day to have a worthy school of American drama.

In some respects the American colloquial language is perhaps to-day a better instrument for this purely realistic class of play than the English colloquial language. A greater number of your population are dealing more directly with realities ; hence your speech is more racy ; it has more present bite and sting ; it

swarms with lusty young idioms. We are constantly importing from you, bright curt phrases and metaphors struck off red-hot in the common mint of the workshop, or the mine, or the factory.

At present and until you have developed a distinctive national American literature, it seems to me that your own modern colloquial language is the fitting, nay, the only vehicle for a national American drama. And for a long generation to come your national drama will be mainly a purely realistic one. And of all characters in the world for an American dramatist, surely present-day Americans are heaven-sent ideal personages for him to study and people his plays withal. A dramatist, a novelist, is never so effective, so life-like, so truly creative as when he is drawing the inhabitants of his own village, his own city, his own circle; the men and women whom he lived amongst in his youth, and unconsciously studied when his memory was fresh, and vivid, and impressionable. Compare George Eliot's portraits in the "Scenes of Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," and "Silas Marner" with some of the intolerable personages in "Daniel Deronda," written after the critics had told her most truly, but most disastrously, that she was a great genius. The self-conscious *ex officio* production of masterpieces is often a terribly wearisome and unprofitable business both for author and reader. I repeat, your own American streets and drawing-rooms, and tramcars, and prairies, are the only possible recruiting ground for the present-day American drama. As for the poetic drama, let it rest awhile. Let me beg your rising dramatists to "cross out those immensely overpaid accounts, that matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath," and set to work in the fresher, busier sphere, the wide, untried domain that awaits and demands them.

And surely America is a most tempting sphere for an American dramatist. I think, guest and stranger as I am, I think I can detect little American weaknesses

and foibles and follies—nay, I will say characteristic American vices, peeping out here and there at your shirt sleeves, from between your waistcoat folds, and especially sticking out from that pocket where you keep your pigskin dollar note purse. Yes, Madam, and I fancy I spy them straying from under your picture hat, and flickering around the sparklets of that diamond necklace, and peeping in and out with the pretty toecaps of your elegant American kid boots. As I walk your streets and ride in your tramcars, and read your journals, and try to fathom your politics, I fancy I hear airy tongues calling out to your American playwrights in some such syllables as these: "Here's a delightful display of American greed and purse-proud egotism and bad manners. Snapshot it! Look at that horribly grotesque piece of American prudery! Tear its mask off! Come here! Watch this morsel of feminine affectation and vanity coming tripping down the street. It's feminine, so deal gently with it, but don't let it escape you. Hush! Here's a great show! All our brother Pharisees and brother hypocrites swelling visibly with windy religious platitudes! Watch them as they troop into church—yes, and into the best seats, too! Stick a pin, point upwards, in their soft cushions! Ah, look at that loud empty piece of brazen bluff! Have you shamed it down? Then, hurry here, and see what a lump of bloated greed and filthy chicanery has enthroned himself in the chief seat of your market place! Are these your gods, O Israel? Arrest him! Hale him to the pillory of the stage! Gibbet him for the delight and warning of American audiences!"

I hope you will not think that in speaking thus plainly, I have overstepped the limits of courtesy which I laid out for myself in starting. I think you must have perceived that throughout this latter part of my lecture I have been advancing the strongest plea on behalf of my brother American playwrights—that the American stage should be first and mainly occupied with the

representation of American life and character, American manners and modes of thought.

I have a great love for France, for her people ; for her fine manners ; for her clear, logical method ; for all that wise encouragement of literature and the arts which will assure her a future place in universal esteem akin to that which Greece holds to-day. Above all, I have an immense admiration for the French drama. But I have constantly protested that the business of the English theatre is not to exhibit absurd emasculated adaptations of French plays, where all the characters, all the situations, all the manners, all the morality, all the modes of thought, all the views of life, are fantastic hybrids and are therefore incurably sterile. Now, although the differences and difficulties between France and England in all that relates to the interchange of plays are enormously greater and more insurmountable than the differences and difficulties between England and America, yet the same reasons are to be urged against the unregulated and wholesale importation of modern English plays into America, and American plays into England.

I shall be credited with speaking from some subtle interested motive here. When I speak or write about the drama in England, I am always credited with some unworthy interested motive ; it being a thing incredible, unheard of, that a man who practises an art should have the honesty to speak about it exactly as he thinks and feels without some selfish ulterior motive. I will ask you, and I will ask my English friends also, not to seek for any underhand motive in what I am saying, for I have none ; my only motive in standing here is this—that you, having done me the honour to ask me to speak here about the modern drama, I do you the common justice to tell you what I feel to be the exact truth.

I believe the French drama and French acting to be immeasurably on a higher level than the English drama and English acting at the present moment. That is no reason why English playwrights should be the lackeys

and underlings of French playwrights. It is a reason for English playwrights and actors and critics and playgoers to set diligently to work—not to adapt and emasculate French playwrights, but to encourage and develop their own native art. The same reason should rule the transplantation of plays from England to America, and from America to England. As I have always urged that the first business of the English drama is to represent modern English life and character, and to move responsively to English civilization, so I equally urge that the main business of the American drama and the American theatre is to represent American life and character, and to move responsively to American civilization.

This is the law that must govern the development of the national drama in any country. Subject to it is the question of the translation and adaptation of foreign plays. When a play either by reason of the strength or the originality of its story, the power of its character drawing, or the depth of its philosophy, is of permanent and universal interest, it should be quite faithfully, and, so far as possible, quite literally translated; all its scenes and all its characters being left in their native country. A modern play should never be adapted except for two good and sufficient reasons—the first one being when its scheme, or some part of its scheme, suggests to a foreign dramatist that it may be so altered and strengthened as to be made into a better, that is into what is virtually an original play. The only other good reason for adaptation arises when a strong, sincere French play can be bought cheaply by an English manager, and being emasculated and sentimentalized into nonsense by a cheap adapter, can then be put upon the English stage to the great glory and gain of the manager. The play then becomes a bulwark of British morality, and the manager becomes worthy of a title.

These are the laws that govern the translation and adaptation of foreign plays. But it may be noted that England and America, having so much that is common

in their language, their manners, their laws, their philosophy, and their religions, there will doubtless always be a much nearer relationship between them in the drama than between any other two nations. There will always be a great number of plays that can be readily transplanted and enjoyed.

Throughout this lecture I have spoken of the English drama, the Anglo-American drama, the American drama in a way that I fear has been confusing. But the confusion exists in the subject itself, and not in my handling of it.

How far are the American and English drama distinct from each other? At present each nation may be said to have in some sort a distinct drama, and a distinct theatre of its own. And yet in everything that counts as the best dramatic art the two nations are to-day almost as one community. I hope this kinship of thought and interest in the drama will endure and will be strengthened. I would like to think that a common drama will be one of the strongest links between the two nations in future generations. You are a cosmopolitan nation. From happy experience I can affirm that you are a generously receptive nation: "Receptivity," says George Eliot, "is a massive quality." It is not only generous to be receptive; it is wise. You are wisely receptive of foreign art. I have just counselled you to make it your chief business to forge and hammer out a distinctive national American drama for yourselves subject to the laws I have stated. I now ask you, for your own sake, to continue to keep an open door, and a warm corner for distinctively English plays and English actors. For, I believe, we can teach you something in technique and finish. Take our technique and use it as a frame for your own living American men and women.

You see I return to the subject of your own living national drama. Forgive me if I have broken my promise, if I have been betrayed into speaking dictatorially and controversially, if I have disputed at the

table of my hosts, if I have arraigned and argued where I ought only to have returned thanks. When I accepted Professor Phelps' kind invitation to speak here, two courses were open to me. I could have strung together a chain of amiable platitudes about the drama which would neither have offended anybody, nor have thrown any light upon the subject. My other course was to speak out exactly what I felt, in the hope that some word of mine might be of service to you in building up a school of American drama, and that I might stimulate your thoughts and actions to that end. For I believe that some such idea is nascent in America to-day, some such "glorious, great intent," which will not be allowed to miscarry and fall to the ground.

How long will the present relationship in the drama continue between England and America? Doubtless the present interchange and transshipment of plays and actors across the Atlantic will, with some modifications, last out the lives of most of us here to-day. But what about the future, the not very distant future, in respect of the lives of our two nations?

No stranger who has visited your great cities can fail to be deeply impressed by the spectacle of the swift and enormous development of a new type of civilization. If that stranger knows England well, he cannot avoid making comparisons between the two countries. And taking a wide impartial view, I think any candid observer must be driven to the conclusion that the American continent tends to develop not only at a very different rate of speed from England, but also in widely different directions. What does this mean?

It means that, either the older nation will drop behind on a different track, or that the younger and more impetuous nation will drag the older nation headlong with it, wherever it goes. On our side we hear plaintive bleatings about the Americanization of our institutions. An Englishman must sympathize with these bleatings, must sometimes bleat. At the same time, we cannot

help watching this fascinating, stupendous, clattering engine of American democracy, with all of you so busy steaming and stoking it—we cannot help watching it and wondering, wondering where it is going, and what will be its future history. At any rate, it is certain that it is creating a new type of civilization, a new national character, with new national ideals and modes of thought. Incidentally, it also means a change in dress, habits, and ceremonies; in all those thousand details and minutiae of every-day life which makes up so large a part of the furnishing of our modern realistic plays.

It means more than this—it means the gradual evolution of a new branch of the English language. You will notice that I have once or twice used the term “American language” in this lecture. I think you may already claim in some sort to have an American language. I daresay many of you will remember that early in the eighteenth century such scholars as Swift and Bentley thought that the English language had arrived at the exact point where it might be fixed and made definite for ever. Swift actually made proposals to that effect. That was before Darwin. No scholar could make such a proposal to-day. It is amusing and instructive to notice that some of the slang words reviled by Swift are now old and respected tenants of all our dictionaries. That the present evolution of [the American continent does imply the evolution of a more or less distinct American language cannot, I think, be doubted. And this, in its turn, implies the evolution of some new form of American drama. What will the future American language be like, the language in which you will be writing your telegrams and your dramas four or five generations to come?

It must always be the highest conscious aim of any civilization to provide a large, dignified, humane, intellectual existence for the greatest possible number of its citizens. So far as this is possible to large classes amongst you, so far will your new language be a fit

instrument for a school of drama correspondingly large, dignified, intellectual, humane.

Prophecy and forecast are not always gratuitous blunders; they are sometimes practical and helpful. A word spoken by a single person in Europe might at any moment usher in events that would entirely displace the present Anglo-American and Anglo-Colonial relationships, and draw undreamed-of sequences into our common civilization, our common language, and our common drama. Who can help sometimes throwing an anxious look into the distant future, and breathing the wish of the dying Henry the Fourth;

Oh God! that one might read the book of Fate
And see the revolution of the times,
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Wearied of solid firmness, melt itself
Into the sea! And other times to see
The beachy girdle of the ocean
Too wide for Neptune's hips; how chances mock
And changes fill the cup of alteration
With divers liquors.

With this large thought in our minds, with this questioning wonder of the future haunting us, it is impossible for an Englishman, especially an Englishman who has been so generously welcomed and honoured in America as I have been, it is impossible for him not to wish your country a very high and noble destiny, bound up so far as may be possible and expedient with the destiny, the civilization, the language, and also with the drama of his own country.

IV

THE AIMS AND DUTIES OF A NATIONAL THEATRE

A lecture delivered at the Columbia University, on the afternoon of Thursday, January 26th, 1911. Chairman, Professor Brander Matthews.

WITH more generosity than discretion our chairman has vacated his pulpit in my favour this afternoon. I think myself a most courageous man to stand here and speak on his own subject before so fine a student and critic of the drama. I am most heartily in accord with him upon all the fundamental principles and doctrines that form the staple of his teaching here. Especially do I give my fast adherence to his constant claim that the drama is first of all a popular art; that it must be primarily addressed not to students, to dilettanti, to coteries, to superior persons, but to the populace of its day; that in so far as it is literature, it must be literature that is understood of the multitude; that even the greatest and most profound dramatist must also be a popular playwright of his day; may, indeed, even be the hack playwright of his theatre, as were Shakespeare and Molière; to sum up—that the drama is like religion, an affair of the whole people.

I should not care to address you on any subject that Mr. Brander Matthews had made his own. I do not think that he has exhaustively treated the subject of a National Theatre. I approach it myself before this audience with great hesitation and reluctance. Not that my ideas are at all doubtful, or hasty, or indefinite. Indeed, I think you will find them very clear and concrete. I hope you will pardon me for speaking what I feel to be the truth. I will deal quite plainly and simply

with you; and so far as I can, I will avoid all direct affirmation, or magisterial utterance. I will try to get at the truth of the matter by suggestion, and hint, and inquiry; leaving you to find your own answers to the questions I shall raise.

When I was in Boston four years ago, I offered, in the exhilaration caused by a friendly banquet, to wager fifty to one that America would have a National Theatre before England. My wager was not accepted, so obvious was it that America would be the first to have what may be called a National Theatre. Well, you have it, a beautiful, dignified building that is an ornament to your city, and a testimony to the princely munificence of its founders. Unfortunately a National Theatre is not a National Drama. We will inquire how far your present theatre, or any theatre you may raise, is a help or a hindrance to your main purpose when we have first inquired what your purpose was and is.

It cannot be supposed that a number of the shrewdest men of the shrewdest nation of the world combined to spend vast sums in an enterprise without some notion of what that enterprise was intended to further and accomplish. What was the purpose of building this magnificent theatre, and lavishing these vast sums to keep it working?

Conceivably, two different answers could be given. One is: "The design of the enterprise was to cultivate a very delicate, refined, exclusive dramatic art that should give a social pleasure to the upper class, something akin to the opera."

But if that answer were the right one, obviously you would be almost entirely dependent upon foreign sources. For you have no repertory of American social drama that could adequately supply you with a pleasure of that sort. And, therefore, the native American drama would be virtually shut out from the National Theatre. Besides, such a scheme would be quite foreign to the national American spirit.

The other answer, which would probably be the right one, would be in some such words as these: "The design of the enterprise was to raise the level of the drama in America, and foster a school of national drama."

Unless I am supplied with another explanation, I will assume that answer to be the right one. But it is an answer which, stated in such general terms, really says no more than that you have very good intentions. Let us inquire very carefully what raising the level of the drama in America specifically means, and what fostering a national drama specifically means in your present circumstances.

We have adopted Mr. Brander Matthews' cardinal maxim that the drama must always be a popular art, an affair of the entire people, sweeping through all ranks like an epidemic. It must be that, first and foremost. But if it is to have any more value, or meaning, or influence than a Punch and Judy show, or a dime museum, if it is at all worth spending thought and money upon, the drama must be much more than that. If it is to be merely a popular entertainment, why trouble to foster it and spend huge sums upon it? There are plenty of crowded theatres in New York and London to-day. Be sure that our dear public will always take good care to be amused. If that is all the drama means and is, it is surely best left alone.

But, it will be replied, this enterprise was started in the idea that the drama does, or should mean something more than an empty amusement, or an empty sensation for the multitude; a thing that catches on for a few months, or a few years, and then perishes without respect.

What, then, should a national drama be in addition to being a mere popular amusement? What virtue should it possess besides that of immediately catching and amusing the crowd?

Mr. Brander Matthews shall again supply us with

an answer. He has summed it up in a single sentence that I have quoted to your sister university: "Only literature is permanent."

Those countries and those periods that have produced a national drama are those countries and those periods where and when literature and the drama have been allied; where plays that were popular in the theatre could be also read and enjoyed as literature. This explains the rarity and intermittency of national dramatic periods.

In England we have a great continuous stream of literature from Chaucer downwards, filling all the reaches of poetry, philosophy, divinity, biography, criticism, history, fiction, and science. But after the great Shakespearian period, when the common man in the innyard feasted on *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* as eagerly as the common man to-day feasts on some musical or farcical inanity—after that period we have only the brilliant comedy of the Restoration, and some occasional shoot or flicker of literary drama. The one necessary condition has been absent. Literature and the theatre have not met together; the playgoer and the man of letters have not kissed each other; they have scarcely been on speaking terms.

In France it has been otherwise. For two centuries and a half there has been an alliance between literature and the drama. Every man of letters is almost necessarily a man of the theatre. Hence great traditions of authorship have been established in the theatre, and hence the average playgoer can find amusement and delight in plays that are also pieces of literature. Hence playgoing means something more than merely running to see the pretty face of a favourite star, or the funny tricks of a comedian. Hence, also, there is a habit of reading modern plays—a habit I take to be at once the sign and the security of a modern national drama. In any country where literature and the drama were in alliance, three-fourths of our most successful plays in

England and America would never be heard of. The other fourth would be tolerated and smiled at as harmless nonsense or sensation.

Therefore, if you ask what was the real design of the magnificent enterprise started two years ago, it must have been this: "To bring about an alliance between literature and the drama in America." Most likely this exact formula was not present in the mind of any of those who founded that enterprise. But will any other formula express a worthy, or even a possible way of raising the level of the drama in America, and of fostering a school of national drama? I define literature briefly as "that part of what a people reads which remains a permanent possession to them, and does not grow old or stale."

When you translate the vague idea of "raising the level of the drama in America and fostering a school of national drama" into a definite scheme, it can mean nothing more or less than bringing the drama into alliance with literature. Try to conceive any other way of raising the level of the drama, and you will only imagine some quite unworthy, vulgar, futile or transitory plan, doomed quickly to end in ridicule and oblivion. This alliance between the drama and literature is then your only possible aim and goal. You mean that America shall make a contribution to the stock of the world's dramatic literature. That is the enterprise to which you have committed yourselves, whether you are conscious of it or no. You must mean that, or you mean nothing at all.

Where this alliance between the drama and literature exists, as in France and to some extent in Germany, the theatre is indeed, as it must always be, a popular pleasure and amusement; but it is so on higher and different grounds from the grounds on which the theatre is a popular pleasure and amusement in England and in America. The kind of pleasure which a large class of playgoers get from their native plays in those countries

is quite different from the pleasure which the majority of theatregoers in England and America get from their native plays. And this is the reason that French people rightly look with contempt on the theatre and the drama in England and America. This is the reason that while the English and American stages are flooded with French plays, no English or American play of any serious literary pretensions is ever successful in Paris, or is ever regarded with anything more than a polite, good-natured smile. I hope then that you will concede to me that the only way of raising the level of the drama in America or in any country is to bring it into alliance with literature.

Now, let us go further and inquire what are the necessary underlying conditions in which such an alliance can be brought about. In what soil, in what atmosphere, can a drama that is both popular and literary be made to grow and flower ?

I have glanced at our great English literature, the richest and fullest the world has ever known. But this literature is itself the expression of a rich and varied spiritual and intellectual national life ; a national life where there has always been a large surplus of power and thought and leisure available for the purchase of those most precious things that cannot be bought with money ; a national life, until these later generations, always homed even to the poorest cottage, in some beautiful and remarkable piece of architecture ; always adorned with many of the domestic, and with some of the fine arts ; always providing for any art, so soon as a mustard seed of it was sown, a deep warm alluvium of receptive soil.

Even the simplest domestic art, the art of making a copper kettle, must have this prepared and cultivated soil. In the farmhouse where I was born every utensil, every piece of crockery, every piece of furniture, was a thing of beauty. You would give a great deal of money for it in your curiosity shops to-day.

We have had then in England for many centuries the necessary underlying conditions, the necessary soil for the production of national drama. When, in addition to these underlying conditions, we happened to get the necessary practical condition, when popular taste in the theatre happened to jump with literature, we obtained specimens of national drama which hold the English and American stage to-day.

We are perhaps losing many of the necessary conditions. But I have faith that if to-day we could bring the general body of English men of letters to some understanding of the modern theatre; if we could win them to active sympathy and co-operation with us; and if we could establish national and municipal theatres and support them until they won popular comprehension and favour—if we could do these things, then a modern national English drama would quickly and spontaneously arise in my country.

It is a most difficult task that lies before us in England. I cannot say that it is in any hopeful way of early accomplishment. Our English scheme is being tossed to and fro amongst a crowd of impracticable people and proposals, and we are likely to make much laughter for the ungodly before it can be put together and made to work. If the launching of a National Theatre in New York has been followed by some disappointment and derision and a sense of present failure, there is, judging from the present outlook, every ground for fearing that the launching of a National Theatre in London will be followed by a similar dashing of hopes, and a similar chorus of gratified mockery. On neither side of the Atlantic does the great ideal of a literary national drama housed in a national theatre and raising the whole level of theatrical entertainment throughout the country to some moderate level of rational enjoyment—in neither England nor America does this noble and reasonable ideal appear to me in any prospect of any immediate fulfilment.

There is always much comfort in having companions in misfortune. If the promoters and well-wishers of a National Theatre in New York are feeling bruised and sore from the immediate failure of their enterprise, let them watch the progress of the National Theatre movement in England and take cheer in the thought that, if they are shipwrecked on lonely shores of depreciation and neglect, a sister British ship is steering straight for the same rocks. They will soon have companions in their misery.

Indeed, in building up a great national enterprise of this kind there is sure to be much confusion and misunderstanding, and a large measure of failure at the outset.

I have faith that in England our task may be ultimately accomplished and brought to a successful issue. But this is not possible till the necessities and difficulties of the situation are clearly seen and vigorously handled by men of insight, judgment, knowledge, and authority. Till such men are in possession and guidance of our national scheme it is bound to fail. Our best hope in England lies in the fact that we still have underlying conditions in our national life that are in some degree favourable to the enterprise. I have already indicated what those conditions are.

We are here at the very heart of this whole matter. If you do not accept what I affirm about these underlying conditions, this prepared soil, as the first necessity for any growth of worthy national drama, then every word I have spoken must be without meaning or effect.

I will not ask you to accept what I say. I will stand aside, and call in the master mind of modern Europe on all these matters. Let me quote a passage from Goethe which I will beg all who are interested in this question to study again and again till they perceive how great a bearing it has upon the fostering of a national drama. Goethe says :

“If a talent is to be speedily and happily developed the great point is that a great deal of intellect and sound culture should be current in a nation. We admire the tragedies of the ancient Greeks, but we ought rather to admire the period and the nation in which their production was possible than the individual authors; for though these pieces differ a little from one another, and though one of these poets appears somewhat greater and more finished than the others, still only one decided characteristic runs through the whole.

“This is the characteristic of grandeur, fitness, soundness, human perfection, elevated wisdom, sublime thought, pure strong intuition, and many other qualities that one might indicate. But when we find those qualities not only in the dramatic works that have come down to us, but also in lyrical and epic works; in the philosophers; in the orators; in the historians; and in an equally high degree in the works of plastic art that have come down to us, we must feel convinced that such qualities did not merely belong to individuals but were the current property of the whole nation and the whole period. Take Robert Burns: how is he great except through the circumstance that the whole songs of his predecessors lived in the mouth of the people—that they were so to speak sung at his cradle; that as a boy he grew up amongst them, and the high excellence of these models so pervaded him that he had therein a living basis on which he could proceed further? Again, why is he great but from this fact that his own songs at once found susceptible ears among his compatriots, that sung by reapers and sheaf-binders they at once greeted him in the field, and that his boon companions sang them to welcome him at the ale-house?”

Now I will ask you to say how far these underlying conditions exist in your American national life to-day?

In the arts of painting and sculpture you have some great modern masters. But have they not mainly derived their inspiration and their mastery from European schools, from having worked in a prepared soil?

Painting and sculpture, however, stand on a different basis of appreciation from the drama. The judges and patrons of painting and sculpture in any country are

a few select persons with a more or less trained knowledge of those arts. The primary judges and patrons of the drama in New York are just the average swarms in Broadway; in London they are just the average swarms in the Strand. We must ever keep in mind that the drama is an affair of the crowd, an affair of the whole people. The moment the playwright loses hold of that fact he finds himself a benighted wanderer, a shepherd on the mountain-side whose sheep have run away from him.

If we have an immensely difficult task before us in fostering a national drama in England, have you not a yet far more difficult task in America?

The best hopes for an American national drama lie in your eager curiosity; in the immense, generous receptivity shown by the ready hearing and welcome you give those who bring you foreign material that you may turn to account; in your large cosmopolitanism of race and feeling; in the high rewards you are prepared to pay for best examples of any kind of art. These are great national qualities, and your possession of them is a very hopeful sign that you will ultimately succeed in developing great national arts of your own.

Another most hopeful sign for the American national drama is the interest taken in it by your leading universities. I must not run any risk of making our chairman blush, but I will say that his volumes on the English-speaking drama are on the whole, the soundest and sanest general contribution to Anglo-American dramatic literature; the most free from prejudice and whim, and personal freakishness; the widest and steadiest in their outlook. They are everywhere in touch with literature, everywhere in touch with humanity, everywhere in touch with the theatre.

Then, in addition to Mr. Brander Matthews' work here, you have the splendid and unique work (unique in regard to university teaching) that is being done by Professor Baker at Harvard, by Professor Phelps at

Yale, and Professor Clark at Chicago. The leavening and fruitful nature of this work is scarcely apparent yet. It will be apparent in years to come, and it cannot fail enormously to influence the future of the American drama and the American theatre, whatever that future may be. These are all most hopeful signs.

I will just glance at a symptom, or perhaps a fact, in your national life and character which appears to frown upon your hopes. There is one thing to note about dramatic literature. It is essentially creative, essentially masculine—more so than any other kind of literature. It must, therefore, have something of brutality in it, however much this may be disguised or concealed. I will touch very lightly on this point. I will merely ask you to say whether there is not amongst you a certain prudishness, a certain narrowness of view, which tends to drive away from your literature and your theatre those works which frankly accept the whole body as well as the whole spirit of man for their foundation and their substance, and are a compound of all humanity? We have this same narrowness, this same one-eyed squint in England. It is a sworn and eternal enemy to literature.

Is not all the greatest literature of the world cunningly fashioned from an alloy of body and spirit? It is true that many of the most exquisite jewels of literature are wrought from pure gold of the spirit. But these are not the greatest things, not the supreme things. The greatest writers of all, and especially the great dramatists, instinctively work with this alloy of body and spirit—sometimes, indeed, with a very base mixture of it. But the alloy is necessary if the coin is to get current and stand the constant handling of everyday circulation. You cannot have a great literature, especially a great dramatic literature, unless it is forged of this alloy, human body and human spirit. Young ladies' literature soon dies. Indeed it never lives. Two little cameos of comedy are hung in my memory: Wordsworth admonishing Robert Burns' sons not to

fall into their father's evil ways; and Mr. Bram Stoker begging Walt Whitman to remove the improprieties from his poetry.

I return to the main conclusion to which we were driven when we asked what is the goal and aim of a National Theatre? It is, as we have seen, to bring the national drama into alliance with the national literature. No other aim or goal is possible, or even conceivable.

Well, how do you propose to bring the American drama into alliance with American literature? What and where is the body of American literature upon which you have to engraft your drama and there nourish it till it becomes a living member of a living organism?

You have great American writers; writers that have a place in the world's literature. Will you ask yourselves how many of them are distinctively American? Like your painters, have they not derived their mastery and inspiration from lands where there was a rich deposit of literary and artistic soil? May I quote to you a saying of Matthew Arnold's? I hope you will not think me impolite in bringing it up. I will risk that. The greatest literary critic of the last generation said: "In all matters of literature and art America is a province of England." That may not be true of American art, but is it not true of American literature? Would it not be confirmed by that consensus of cultivated literary Anglo-American opinion which alone has authority to give a verdict? If you dissent from it, will you not be obliged to justify your dissent by naming a roll of American writers in the world's literature, radically distinct and separate from the roll of English writers; isolated from English literature by reason of qualities that have unmistakably sprung from American soil?

Undoubtedly you can claim one or two such writers—Mark Twain and Walt Whitman for instance. But these and any others who can be classed in the world's literature as distinctively American are not in touch

with the drama. I think it impossible to doubt that with the abundant energy and youth of this nation, its ceaseless and varied activities, its thirst for knowledge, its desire to excel in literature and art—I think it impossible to doubt that you will inscribe many great and worthy names on the roll of the world's literature. But if you cannot claim to have a roll of distinctively American writers to-day, do you not admit my major contention that at any rate for the present you have not in your national life those underlying conditions, that prepared soil, in which alone a great and distinguished national drama can grow? I do not say that you are not on the eve of developing those conditions. Perhaps they are crumbling and decaying in England. Perhaps they are ripening in America. I do not say that some penetrative leaven of just clear thought and feeling may not so work in the American theatre to-day as wholly to change the tastes and habits of your playgoing public. It is largely a matter of habit. All the latest researches, both in brain science and in sociology go to proclaim that individuals and communities are almost entirely the creatures of habit, of custom, of set modes of thinking and acting. We live in ruts and rabbit-holes of daily routine and usage. It is a fact that the average formation and convolutions of our brains are quite equal to those of the Greek philosophers and poets. Potentially we are quite capable of their achievements. Only we haven't got into the knack, the habit of it. In Greece they got into a habit of talking philosophy and carving beautiful statues, and writing great tragedies. So they did it very well. In England and America we have got into a habit of making motor cars, and buying stocks and shares. And we do it very well, because we esteem motor cars and stocks and shares more highly than we esteem philosophy and poetry. Our dominant and possessive habits of thought all run that way, and guide, and colour, and shape all our estimates of things.

But national habits of thought, national character,

national conduct, national ways of looking at things, may change very rapidly in our new civilization, as we have seen in the case of Japan. And what I have called the necessary underlying conditions for the growth of a national drama in America may possibly come into being within a comparatively short space of time. At present I think your first inquiry should be as to what area of this prepared soil is already deposited in your national life for your national drama to grow in?

Now, I have taken up so much time in searching with you for the aim and goal of a National Theatre that little time is left to speak of the duties of a National Theatre. They are more apparent than the aim, and we need do little more than briefly run them over.

The first duty of a National Theatre is obviously to protect the commercial side of the enterprise until the national theatre and the national drama are so firmly established in popular favour and comprehension as to pay their own way. That much, and nothing more. Wild ideas are bruited in England that the National Theatre ought to be perpetually supported by government as an educational institute for ramming down the throats of playgoers doses and pills of social, political, and scientific theories and doctrines. English playgoers have already swallowed a sample or two of the drugs offered them, and have left the theatre with wry faces and sick stomachs.

Let Goethe have another word. He says, "Shakespeare and Molière wished above all things to make money by their theatres. Nothing is more dangerous to the well-being of a theatre than when the director is so placed that he can live on in careless security, knowing that however the receipts of the treasury may fail he will be able to indemnify himself from another source."

A National Theatre ought to be liberally subsidized until such time as it has won public favour and comprehension, and established sound traditions of authorship

and acting. After that it ought to take care of itself and make such a profit as will enable it always to tide over bad seasons and unavoidable misfortunes. If you say that it ought to be perpetually subsidized to meet current expenses, then you say it exists for the purpose of boring playgoers with something they don't want ; it becomes not a National Theatre, but a national mausoleum for the preservation of defunct specimens of dramatic art.

Another duty of the National Theatre is to provide machinery for keeping alive such plays of literary value and artistic workmanship as may not immediately catch the ear of the great public, but which yet have signs of future life and growth in them.

Again, it is plainly the duty of a National Theatre to give constant performances of the classical masterpieces of the language. This, in your case, means the masterpieces of English drama. Undoubtedly a great and high pleasure is to be obtained from watching the performance of our standard tragedies and comedies. But classic plays are to be considered chiefly as models to be used for our guidance and imitation in fashioning works of our own time. It is the living drama of our own day whose fostering must be our chief concern. It is the living drama of our own day, and not the revivals of classical plays, that should be most welcomed and most honoured on our modern stage. Shakespeare's and Molière's companies were not employed in dusting up ancient masterpieces, and chopping and adapting them to a different mode of representation. When the chief public interest centres round an archæological restoration and the chief honours are given to it, you may be sure there is only a very languid and pulseless living drama.

Once more, it is the duty of a National Theatre to give revivals of those modern works of the last generation which had a literary quality and which also drew the public. The revival of a play in another theatre and

with new actors often exposes it in a different light, and proves it to have lasting merits which were not apparent at first. It is to be noted that the Théâtre Français constantly draws into its repertory those pieces which have been successfully produced at other theatres, and which have shown themselves also to possess a claim to rank as dramatic literature. This is a valuable and important function of a national theatre.

Some further plain duties of a National Theatre are to put the drama into active sympathy and relation with all the other arts ; to issue a plain, beautifully printed programme ; to forbid all unworthy methods of advertisement and ways of gaining the public ear : to throw out feelers and to draw towards it all citizens who have authority in matters of intellect, and science, and religion, and literature.

But one of the chief duties of a National Theatre is to offer a rigorous apprenticeship and training in the fine art of acting ; to open a school where all that is best in the technique of acting shall be taught by the best teachers ; to insist that no actor shall come upon its boards who has not mastered this technique. How can we have plays of serious thought and meaning on our boards unless we have actors who can not merely sympathetically apprehend that meaning, but who have also the necessary technique by which they can drive it home to the public ?

But all these, and many other duties of a National Theatre are so plain as to need no enforcement, scarcely even a mention. They lie upon the surface of the business.

I return then to the aim and goal of a National Theatre, to the idea that must govern the enterprise if it is to be brought to a successful issue. May I re-state it on account of its great importance ? You have started out to foster a school of American drama that as literature shall meet and satisfy the judgment of cultivated Anglo-American men of letters. You may say you have started

out to do nothing of the kind. Then, what have you started out to do? Conceivably, as I said at first, you intended "to cultivate a very delicate, refined, exclusive dramatic art that shall give a social pleasure akin to the opera." Well, I think that is worth doing, and I think a city like New York should support a theatre of that kind. It could probably be made to pay; certainly its upkeep would be infinitesimal compared with the upkeep of your present enterprise.

But such a scheme is quite distinct from the aim and goal of an American National Theatre. I beg you to take note of this, because I am persuaded that the confusion of the two schemes can only bring you further disappointment and failure. To support a small theatre for the production of high-class exotic comedy and drama is not the work of a National Theatre; though indirectly it may lend valuable aid to the larger scheme. The aim and goal of an American National Theatre can only be to bring your national drama into alliance with literature.

Meantime, as a means to this end you have built a handsome theatre. Is not that very much as if Saint Paul had begun by building Canterbury Cathedral, instead of by preaching the gospel? Ought you not first to get hold of a few Saint Pauls and set them preaching? Does not the whole matter of a National Theatre need to be approached from another side, and in a wholly different spirit? Have you not been trying to impose something upon your national life that must spring up from within it?

Undoubtedly there have been mistakes of management, and the very grave mistake of admitting productions that should have no possible place in a National Theatre. But in the present condition of things, are you likely to fare much better in the future? If you build another theatre and put it under other management, will not the result be very much the same while the present underlying conditions remain? Where are

your plays to come from—plays that shall successfully make both a popular and a literary appeal? Great plays are not written in the air for an imaginary audience. They are written in an atmosphere of great plays and great traditions, to be played by a company of highly trained actors before a sympathetic and appreciative audience. Will you not be driven about to find attractions that will not be of any higher or more conspicuous merit than the attractions offered by the commercial managers round you? Will they not still have the first choice of what is in the market? Will you not every now and then be obliged to put up some quite unworthy stopgap which will tend to bring your whole enterprise into contempt? And when your work is brought before the ultimate tribunal, the tribunal of cultivated English-speaking men of letters, what will the verdict be? It is a high and severe tribunal. Any author, English or American, who brings his play to a National Theatre must be prepared to face it. Indeed he should write his play with the knowledge and the hope that this court of appeal will be his final judge. I think I see many a writer of successful plays, English and American, flattered by the acclaim of the critics and the public, tripping up the steps of that court, his manuscripts under his arm. Will not a terribly disdainful and ironic smile be the only answer vouchsafed him? Is it worth while for a National Theatre to spend, season after season, large sums of money to produce plays that finally can but provoke that terribly disdainful smile?

These are questions which I think you may well consider before you take another step, or spend a single additional cent. I am sure you are still prepared to be very generous in this matter. Money is certainly necessary to float this enterprise at the beginning. But the spending of money, the production even of successful plays, will not bring you any satisfying result or any lasting honour unless you get those plays passed and hallmarked as literature.

Well, there it is! As you Americans say, "That's all there is to it."

I have spoken with the heartiest sympathy for your enterprise, with every wish that you may succeed, with every wish to save you from that continued disappointment which may end in your abandoning it altogether. In English papers it is sometimes made a matter of comment that American millionaires do not take any public part in the politics of their country. About that I have no opinion to offer, except that politics generally seem to me so muddy and noisy a business, that anybody who keeps out of it is to be heartily congratulated. But the millionaires of America do most generously advance and support the art and science of their country. And are they not thus doing a better, a higher thing, are they not conferring deeper and more lasting benefits on their countrymen than if they became active politicians?

There are others besides the founders who have worked for the success of this great enterprise of a National Theatre and a national drama. There are many now on both sides of the Atlantic fired with this idea, hoping, working, fighting to bring the modern drama right into the centre of the intellectual and artistic life of the two nations. In the end I believe they will succeed. There will be many mistakes, many disappointments, many failures, much discouragement, much fighting with beasts at Ephesus like Saint Paul, but in the end I believe they will succeed. And every soldier in this cause may hear a celestial salutation from the abode where the eternal are :

"They out-talked thee, hissed thee, tore thee?
 Better men fared thus before thee.
 Fired their ringing shot and passed
 Hotly charged—and sank at last.

"Charge once more then, and be dumb.
 Let the victors when they come,
 When the forts of folly fall,
 Find thy body at the wall."

V

A NOTE ON THE AMERICAN NATIONAL THEATRE

September, 1912.

THE New Theatre on Central Park, New York, a very handsome and imposing building, was erected by American millionaires for the purpose of elevating the drama in America. It was opened in the autumn of 1909 with a lavish production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. During the next two seasons the theatre offered a curiously variegated programme, including several tasteful and creditable productions, but not indicating any clear or original policy either on the modern or the poetic side. Indeed, in such a theatre and under such conditions it was impossible for the management to have a policy. At the end of the second season, after enormous losses, the enterprise was abandoned, and the theatre has since been given over to popular spectacle. It remains a staring monument of the futility of building a National Theatre for intellectual drama before some considerable knowledge and appreciation of intellectual drama are spread amongst the general playgoing public. It offers some warnings to the projectors of the English scheme, which I have tried to indicate in the later essay on "The English National Theatre" (p. 121).

The American scheme was foredoomed to failure; partly from the huge size of the building, which rendered it quite unsuitable except for plays requiring the loudest and broadest style of acting. All delicate

and intimate effects of voice and gesture and expression were lost to nine-tenths of the audience.

Our modern drama seems for the moment to be depending more and more on minute colloquial realistic effects. The alivest and most interesting work of recent years can only be seen to advantage in a small theatre. It was, therefore, impossible for the manager of the New Theatre to make a success with modern plays of literary and intellectual quality, even if he had been able to obtain them. Mr. Winthrop Ames may be congratulated on having resigned a hopeless task in giving up the management of the New Theatre. He may be more heartily congratulated on building the New York Little Theatre, and therein offering American playgoers a perfect home for intellectual drama. It is a delight simply to be within its walls.

VI

SPEECH AT THE OXFORD UNION

Delivered at a debate of the Oxford Union on the motion, "That this House would welcome the establishment of a National Theatre," on the evening of June 2nd, 1910.

I MUST own that I am a little surprised to find that in Oxford University there is any difference of opinion as to the advisability of founding a National Theatre in England.

I am inclined to think that the most powerful arguments for a National Theatre are to be found in the present condition of the Drama in England. In the month of February I had occasion to look up how many Shakespearean performances were taking place in Great Britain on a certain night. Throughout the length and breadth of the land there was only one—a performance of "Twelfth Night" at the Queen's Theatre at Manchester. During the month of May, when the London season is at its height, after the Shakespearean Festival at His Majesty's, there was not a single Shakespearean performance in London. At the present moment there is only one, and that at a cheap-price theatre. Speaking generally, I think we may say there has been a very marked slump in Shakespeare for some years past. We do, indeed, get occasional revivals, but the length of their run is noticeably shorter than was the corresponding run of Shakespearean plays under Irving's management twenty-five years ago. Shakespeare then

ran for two or three hundred nights. Our present managers have a difficulty in getting him up to a hundred. Thanks to the devotion and energy of Sir Herbert Tree, we have a Shakespearean Festival every year and there are some good, and occasionally notable performances in it. But for all-round acting our present representations of Shakespeare will not compare with those of twenty-five years ago, when they were stiffened and broadened by the acting of many actors trained in the old school. There is, indeed, a very noticeable decline in the art of speaking blank verse on the English stage. But surely a high proficiency in the art of speaking verse is the very foundation of any tolerable school of Shakespearean acting.

In reviewing Shakespearean performances during the last thirty years, how few of the great Shakespearean passages can we remember that have been adequately rendered. How rare is it to listen to one of these passages on the English stage and to get the proper pleasure from its delivery. How often, indeed, do we find these great passages merely mangled and mumbled in such a way that we should never suspect them to be verse unless we knew it. I do not say that we do not get other delights from our Shakespearean performances—delights from the scenery, from pieces of thoughtful characterization, from the management of crowds; but this first and most essential delight of a Shakespearean performance, the delight of hearing blank verse musically spoken, we scarcely ever get upon our London stage.

When we turn to the modern drama, we may find certain very hopeful and encouraging signs. Our production of modern drawing-room comedy is at a very high level. But when we come to serious drama, dealing in an honest and searching way with our modern life, we are forced to own that scarcely three pieces have met with any success during the last six years. Serious

drama in London has no hold whatever upon the public. This may be the fault of dramatic authors who cannot write serious plays sufficiently interesting; or it may be the fault of the actors who cannot interpret great passions in such a way as to make them credible; or it may be the fault of the public who demand mere frivolous entertainment of the theatre. But there is the fact that while dozens of serious plays are being successfully produced in France and Germany, the English stage generally produces them to run a few nights only to empty houses.

If we turn to the provinces, we may almost say that the drama is dead. The theatres are empty except when musical comedies are being played, or when a London star brings down his company to play the latest London success. Meanwhile, the large music halls are crammed, and are everywhere squeezing the drama out of existence. These music halls do indeed give certain sketches and dramatic scenes, but they are for the most part very crude, and on a very debased level.

To sum up, we may say that to-day in England the drama scarcely exists as a form of art at all; it is merely tolerated by the great public as a hanger-on of popular amusement.

Now I will ask you to say whether you think that state of things is a desirable one? I will grant that the drama in all ages has been more or less connected with popular amusement. The first thing that an author or an actor learns is that he must amuse or interest his public. I am always affirming that the end of the drama is to interest and amuse. There is no question about this; the question is on what level and by what means the public shall be interested and amused in the theatre. For many years I have been begging English theatre-goers to separate their drama from popular amusement. As a matter of fact, the drama and popular amusement will never be separated on the stage. The separation must be made in the mind of the theatre-goer.

It is really a question of how far theatre-goers can be persuaded to take a delight in the drama as a study and an interpretation of life, or even as an exhibition of manners. It is a question whether the drama shall be a branch of popular amusement and muddled up with it, or whether it shall again become a branch of English literature, and judged on that level.

But, you ask, will the establishment and endowment of a National Theatre bring this about? Undoubtedly the national recognition of the drama would tend to bring about this result, inasmuch as it would bring the theatre into relation with the intellectual and artistic life of the nation. At the present moment literature stands largely aloof from the stage. Literary men will not take the trouble to learn the very hard and tedious craft of play-writing. They write unactable plays which don't go home to the public, and when these fail, they become contemptuous of the drama. Most of you will remember George Meredith's fine Essay on Comedy and his splendid tribute to Molière. Well, lately we have seen a comedy by George Meredith, which was, indeed, splendidly written, so far as one's wits were nimble enough to follow it. But its personages were lifeless and purposeless and artificial, and it had no definite concrete scheme of action. And it was written in affected language, not understood of the people; so one was forced to ask why George Meredith did not follow Molière's reported habit of first reading his comedy to his housekeeper.

Now a National Theatre would tend to draw the best literary men of the day to write for it, and amongst them some would be found teachable enough to grasp the fact that playwriting is a very skilled art, altogether apart from literature in itself. Then, again, a National Theatre would most likely attract many of those fine actors who are now wandering about because they have not the business instinct sufficiently developed to take and manage a theatre, with all its attendant anxieties

and vexations. There are many fine actors who are rarely seen on the London stage because they have not influence enough, or money enough, to secure a theatre to act parts that will display their abilities. In a National Theatre I hope we should have a very fine all-round company, so that all the parts would be played on an equal level. This should not interfere with the present star actors who wish to surround themselves with a company of their own. Rather a healthy competition would be developed between the National Theatre and the other managements, with the result of raising the standards all round.

What would be the result of a Shakespeare National Theatre upon the public?

It is useless to write plays that are wide away from, or that are far ahead of, the tastes and habits of the general body of the theatre-going public. Plays are meant to be popular and to draw a great crowd. Shakespeare was the most popular playwright of his day. He gave the public what they wanted, as every successful playwright must do. But what do the public want? I believe that gradually, and perhaps very slowly, the public can be led to take an interest and delight in the drama as an intellectual entertainment. I believe that the great public is indifferent enough and good-natured enough to be gradually led out to take an interest in drama that can worthily be called a national art. The truth is that the public are always being educated, whether they know it and whether they like it or not. Consider the enormous education of the public during the last twenty years in the popular form of musical comedy. They have been persuaded and told that the serious drama is dull, that it is immoral, that it will bore them, that they ought to go to the theatre to be amused; and these doctrines have been preached to them with such insistency that we may say the English play-going public have been deliberately educated down to their present low standard. It is certain that the

leading newspapers in the country could in a few years work a great change in the standard of the English drama. We are all creatures of habit to an extent that we never sufficiently recognize. The English public is not so dull, so stupid, so intellectually degraded, as it is often believed to be. I believe that if one National Theatre with high standards of authorship and acting were established amongst us, that there is not only a public sufficient to fill that theatre and make it pay, but I believe there is a larger public growing up who would be drawn to the numerous theatres that we might expect to follow and copy the example thus set before them. I believe that we should see, not only in London, but in our great provincial cities, theatres started with high artistic aims, and controlled by the citizens of those cities as a local institution. Thus gradually great traditions would be established amongst us, not only in London, but all over the country. I have the greatest faith that ultimately the English play-going public could be educated to a very high level indeed.

But you say: Ought a National Theatre to be subsidized for this purpose? For my own part, seeing what an enormous influence the drama might have, I think it would be a wise economy of the government to start theatres in every large centre. I believe the national money could not be spent in a better way.

But the scheme which I am here to support to-night is not calling for government aid. It is hoped that the English-speaking people throughout the Empire will themselves recognize the necessity of establishing the drama as a national art, and will support the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre to the extent of giving it a handsome building and a secure start.

I cannot understand any objection that has been raised to this scheme, except those that come from interested people; and these are indeed easily to be understood. When Paul and Silas visited Thyatira, they met with much opposition from the proprietors of

a soothsaying girl. Paul had cast a devil out of the soothsaying girl, and had thus taken away her vocation, and the gains of her proprietors. Upon this the proprietors took great objection to Paul's doctrines, and clapped Paul and Silas into prison. I quite understand the opposition to a National Theatre which comes from the proprietors of the soothsaying girl; and from all whose gains and position would be endangered by its establishment with high standards in acting and authorship. Indeed, although there has been much opposition to the endowment of a National Theatre, it is a curious fact that at the present moment many existing forms or perversions of English drama are largely endowed by private persons. I believe if we could turn over the books of all the London theatres in the last thirty years, and discover their exact balances, we should find that enough money had been wasted and thrown away in London theatres to establish and endow three or four such institutions as the present proposed National Theatre. I cannot, of course, have access to the books and give you the exact figures, but as a matter of fact those who are best qualified to estimate will tell you that an enormous sum of money is being continually poured into the London theatres to support their different entertainments. Of course this money is often not given for the sake of the drama, but to support a certain manager, or at times, perhaps, for less worthy motives. Is it not an extraordinary fact that rich men can be found in abundance to support quite frivolous and unintellectual forms of entertainment, and yet cannot be found to put their hands in their pockets and unite in a scheme for establishing and fostering this fine art of Shakespeare? But I believe that the English people will come forward and raise a National Theatre as a worthy monument to our great poet. I may point out here that there is no other scheme in contemplation to do honour to him on the third centenary of his death. Again, it is not proposed

to devote the National Theatre exclusively to Shakespearean performances. The modern and really vital drama of our time will also have its due share of representation.

The standing argument for a National Theatre is, of course, the Théâtre Français in Paris. With that great theatre constantly before us, it seems absurd to argue against the establishment of a National Theatre in London.

In England for generations past the drama and literature have been virtually separated. We had a great Victorian literature, but its great names are not on our roll of playwrights, except as failures. It is generations since a name, great in English literature, was also great on the English stage. But if we look across the Channel we find that the greatest names in French literature have also been those of the greatest dramatists. There is scarcely a name of note in French literature for two centuries that has not appeared on play-bills as the name of a successful dramatist. It is because a National Theatre would afford a meeting-place for English literature and English drama, that I appeal to you to support this movement. Surely Oxford is the last place where the necessity for a union between English literature and the English drama will be denied. Surely Oxford is the last place where such a movement will be refused an enthusiastic and overwhelming support.

VII

THE RECOGNITION OF THE DRAMA BY THE STATE

Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century Review* for March, 1904,
by the kind permission of the late Sir James Knowles.

IT is always a critical and dangerous moment for any business when the stress of events frightens everybody into the easy exclamation that "something must be done!" For so often it happens in the panic that the wrong thing is done, and done so thoroughly and effectually, that the whole business is thenceforth maimed and disjointed, and falls to the ground.

We have reached such a critical and dangerous moment in the affairs of the English drama; or rather in the affairs of that curious hotchpotch which, being collectively exhibited in some twenty-five fashionable, expensive West-end theatres, is supposed to be our national English drama.

A fearless and admirable letter from Mr. John Hare in the *Times*, briefly sketching and bewailing our present sorry plight, has been endorsed by an imposing array of notable names—a bishop to head the list; a few august literary persons; our leading actor-managers, with three English playwrights piously and respectfully following in their train; two or three leading lights in science; two or three eminent artists; a sprinkling of social celebrities; and various other personages all of credit and renown in their different ways—altogether a very weighty and representative assembly, furnishing abundant evidence that amongst all classes of cultivated

Englishmen a benevolent, if vague, conviction is spreading that "something must be done!" But what?

I cannot help regretting that the alarm has been sounded to help and save the English *stage*, rather than to help and save the English *drama*. For this way of putting the matter implies that the English drama is in itself so inconsiderable and negligible a thing that for all practical purposes it may be said to be summed up and contained in the English stage, as the greater contains the less. If this absorption of the English drama in the English stage be affirmed as a present-day indisputable fact, it must be asked, "Is not the virtual subserviency of our drama to our stage the great indirect cause of all our ills?" If it be affirmed as an eternal predestined necessity that the English drama shall always be absorbed in, and confused with, the English stage, then we must challenge the statement in the plainest and strongest way; and we must point to France, where, the drama being recognized and honoured as a distinct literary art, its intellectual and artistic level is thereby immeasurably raised; while the intellectual and artistic level of the French theatre is necessarily raised in association with the drama. In England, having no national drama, what can be the real value of our theatre?

But it may be that in sounding this rallying cry, the mistake of considering the English drama as the mere creature and instrument of the English stage has been made unconsciously, through mere inattention. But is not that just the mistake that the great body of English playgoers make, and is not that just the way they make it? It is all lightly taken, and swallowed, and dismissed as a mere entertainment. And hence we have no English drama.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood or misrepresented in this matter. I am not decrying the great and noble art of acting. I have benefited too much, and suffered too much, not to be aware how great an artist

a great actor is, and that without him the dramatist is a helpless, gibbering shade. Surely none can sufficiently value and praise the actor, except the author. And for myself, words cannot convey the deep gratitude I have to some of my interpreters.

But gratitude and courtesy cannot away with the fact that if we are to make any advance, either in the art of acting or the art of the drama, they must be generally recognized as distinct arts, and their relations to each other must be clearly perceived. At present the great majority of playgoers do not at all distinguish between the art of acting, and the art of the drama; nor do they ever think of a play as a separate organism, as something quite distinct from any one of its many possible varying interpretations. Now, though we cannot have a great national drama without a body of highly trained and intellectual actors, yet still less can we have any great or intellectually effective acting without the material to work upon. And granted that we have much to seek both in the matter of plays and of acting, yet as the play must be written, before actors, scene-painters, and carpenters can get to work at all, surely the English stage can only be helped and saved when, and after, and inasmuch as the English drama is first helped and saved. That is to say, the whole question of having a living English national drama depends upon first catching your dramatists, upon giving them the best and most highly trained acting talent, and then allowing them free scope. And any helping or saving the English stage upon the condition that it is a corporate entity containing that negligible and inconsiderable thing, the English drama, can only give us a few more exploits in acting, of no more permanent value or influence than the exploits of an acrobat.

I have touched this point at starting, and I have pressed it home with some vehemence, because it is really the key of the whole situation. And there is no issue out of our present difficulties except by the way it

opens to us. I am writing in no carping spirit, and surely with no desire except to further a most apt and timely movement, a movement most generously conceived and launched, a movement that if rightly pursued promises to be of the greatest advantage both to the English drama and the English stage. But if it is to be effective, it must be pursued on a clear understanding of the whole matter.

For many a long day the impression has prevailed, and still prevails amongst the great body of playgoers, that the English drama is the instrument, and creature, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage. This assumption governs all matters relating jointly to the drama and the stage: it is apparent in the form and wording of the letter I am now discussing; it is the darling axiom of many of our leading actors; it is the sheet-anchor of our whole present system; it is the fetish of a very considerable portion of the press; it is ingrained in the public opinion of the country. Then why be so foolhardy as to combat it? Because, until it is combated and overthrown, there can be no sure standing-ground for any English drama, let alone any advance for the English stage or the English drama.

Now I do not say that this impression, namely, that the English drama is the instrument, and creature, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage—I do not say that this impression has been altogether unreasonable, or even untrue during the past generation. There have surely been sufficient reasons for it. And so far as it has been a witness to great aims, great ambitions, and in some cases to great impersonations, one can very cordially sympathize with it.

And, for love of sweet peace, one would be only too glad to subscribe to it, and to march at its festivals, dutifully cheering and shouting with the crowd, if only it led to our desired goal, the establishment of a great, living, English acted drama. But where has this root idea led us? What has been the issue of it? That it

has failed to create or foster a satisfactory English stage, or a satisfactory English drama, is sufficiently evident from a single glance at the present state of things.

It has failed. There can be no doubt of that. But has it failed victoriously? There is no quickener like the spilt blood of a lost cause. Has this lost cause sown mandrakes anywhere to spring up again and shake and fertilize these clods, this dry, dead stubble of modern English life? Has the idea of the domination of the English drama by the English stage left any sign, or monument, or result, except one or two deservedly great personal reputations? What has it done even for the English stage as distinct from the English drama? Has any school of acting been founded? Have not the remains of the old school dwindled and vanished under its influence? Have any great traditions been established, except the traditions of careful and beautiful mounting and *mise en scène*? Is the acting in the London revivals of our classic and poetic drama on a level with the average performances of municipal theatres on the Continent? Does London get a chance of seeing as much Shakespeare, and that as well acted, as many small German towns? With the greatest number and the most expensive theatres in the world, has the public taste been really raised at all, or raised to anything except to universal musical comedy? Has it not become increasingly difficult for an English playwright to cast adequately any serious work? (I class modern comedy as serious work.) Have not our leading actors become more and more dissociated from our leading playwrights, to the great disadvantage of our employer, the public? Does not this dissociation tend to become more marked, as the idea that the English drama is part and parcel of the English stage becomes more deeply fixed in the public mind? Has it not become almost vain to hope that any play containing great emotions, or wide views of life, will be written at

all ; or if written, will be produced ; or if produced, will be played in such a great and convincing manner as to be successful, or even to escape a perhaps derisive failure ? And is not this state of things the direct and inevitable result of our present system, based as it is on the prevalent idea that the English drama is the creature, and instrument, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage—an idea that for the most part allows the great playgoing public to rest perfectly satisfied when its favourite actor has scored a personal success, irrespective of the permanent value and meaning and intellectual quality of the play ?

It will be noticed that I have gone behind the course of events and the apparent facts, and that I have searched for the governing idea that has shaped the recent history of the English stage and the English drama. I think it will be difficult for anyone to dispute that the present situation has been largely shaped by this main idea in the public mind, the idea everywhere carefully fostered, that the English drama is the instrument of the English stage.

Is that idea to be perpetuated ? Is it to be tacitly adopted and made the basis of our future action ? Is it to underlie our proposed reforms ? Is it to be the accepted principle that is to govern the future relations of the English drama and the English theatre ?

Because, if that be so, I take the liberty of telling my illustrious co-signatories that we may spare ourselves any further trouble either of signing or of doing, for the end of our reforms will find us pretty much where we are ; the cart, stuck persistently in front of the horse, will only have pushed the horse a little further down the hill into a little deeper mire.

I think I see a little cherub sitting up aloft and mocking at my illustrious co-signatories, bishops, eminent literary personages, actor-managers and all.

Now, granted that the situation is as it has been sketched for us, and as it has been accepted by my

illustrious co-signatories, we are much like the lepers outside Samaria; things can scarcely come to a worse pass with us whatever we do, or wherever we go.

Perhaps a suggestion may be welcome. Seeing that it is ideas that prompt action and shape history, perhaps it will be wise if we begin with an idea, and base our reforms on that. And seeing that the present governing idea in the English playgoing mind, namely, the idea that the English drama is the creature, and instrument, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage, has been found not to work; and is, indeed, largely responsible for the present *impasse*; suppose we try to foster the alternative idea, namely, that the English stage is, or should be, the instrument of the English drama. Suppose we put the horse in front of the cart. I know it is a violent, nay, a revolutionary proceeding, but I think it will be found to be fruitful. At any rate, let us try how it works.

Again I will beg not to be misunderstood. I am not trying to depreciate the actor's art. I am not trying to belittle the men who, in a time of great difficulty and transition, and of low artistic ideals, have done very hard and valuable work, and have helped to save the English drama from utter extinction.

No, it is our system that is to blame; and not the men who work it in many cases with conspicuous devotion, and certainly with as much self-sacrifice as can be expected from average human nature.

But that the system is a bad one is proved by the situation it has created. It is a bad one because it places the responsibility for the English drama upon the actor. Why should a leading actor encourage the English drama? It is surely not to his interest to produce English plays if ready-made French ones, that will provide him with a leading part, can be bought outright and adapted for a small sum. Nor is it to his interest to train and school a large body of capable actors, who would, indeed, be of immense value to the dramatist and

to the drama, but who can only work with the idea and the ambition of competing with him, the leading actor, for one of the four or five leading positions on the English stage. Nor is it really in furtherance of the actor's legitimate ambition that great English plays should be produced at all, otherwise than as they may happen to provide a strong or showy leading part for himself. Very often, perhaps most frequently, the greatest acting successes are made in plays that, outside their acting opportunities, are quite worthless. Can anything be more childish or contemptible or absurd than the pieces in which some of our favourite actors have scored their greatest personal successes? And the first question for a leading actor must always be, nay, rightly and naturally should be, not "Is this a great or a fine play?" but "How far can I score here, and keep my leading position?" Therefore, if the English drama has been kept alive at all, it has not been because of our system, but in spite of it, and because one or two of our managers have sometimes risen superior to it.

And now at last we have come to the moment when it is plain to everybody that the system is not working, and cannot be got to work; and that if the English drama and the English stage are to be kept alive in our midst, if the golden leisure and evening hours of the English people are not to be wasted in the emptiest, tawdriest tomfoolery; if this is to be avoided "something must be done!" But what?

Again I submit that no progress can be made till the horse is put before the cart. Again I submit that all attempts at reform will be useless till we have changed the root idea that insensibly and unconsciously guides English playgoing—namely, that the English drama is the negligible and inconsiderable appurtenance of the English theatre. Till that root idea is changed, till the English drama is recognized and judged as a distinct literary art, the little cherub who sits aloft, with

his telescope searching the earth for solemn farces, merely mocks and grins at us, mocks and grins.

I have suggested what seems to me to be the root idea that should inform and direct any action that may be taken in the matter—namely, the idea that the English drama should be recognized and judged as a distinct literary art, as it is in France.

But is it not already so recognized and judged? Inevitably, if an educated man by chance goes to the theatre, he must taste the quality of the stuff that is put before him. And to this extent we are, of course, inevitably judged. But this judgment is not in any way operative. The mischief of our present system lies here—an English serious dramatist is scarcely judged at all by the quality of his work. If he writes down to any supposed low level in his audience or to any supposed incapacity in his interpreters, he is instantly judged by a high standard, and condemned. Rightly judged, rightly condemned, since there can be neither reason nor excuse for writing down to anything or anybody.

But what happens when he does his best? By the great general playgoing public the English dramatist is classed and judged simply as an amusement-monger, and he succeeds or fails solely on that level; and if he does not succeed on that level he is anathema maranatha all round, since literature will not stretch out a hand to save or comfort him. English literature disdains and disowns us, and is for the most part soured with a silly jealousy of us; and is perked up with a silly pride in its own fine outer raiment of style; not knowing, and not caring to know, and, indeed, refusing to know, that English play-writing is the most toilsome, the most anxious, the most subtle form of English literature. Let me go further, and, without trailing my coat or biting my thumb at anybody, make what will appear to be the monstrous assertion that good play-writing is the most fastidious form of literature. But it is really

as a mere amusement-monger that the English playwright is judged; on that level and by that measure does he stand or fall.

Therefore it is that, again and again, I point out to my illustrious co-signatories that no action we may take can be effectual to our end until we have passed everywhere into general currency amongst playgoers the idea I have suggested, namely, this—that the English drama is not, and ought not to be, the creature, and instrument, and tributary, and appurtenance of the English stage; it is not, and ought not to be, the purveyor of cheap and tawdry entertainment; it is the fine and literary art which portrays and interprets, or attempts to portray and interpret, English life. And the English stage will be a power in English life to the exact extent, and in the exact proportion, to which it is recognized to be the instrument of the English drama. That is the idea which must be the mainspring of any effective action.

Surely nobody can have subscribed to Mr. Hare's welcome letter more cordially than myself. More than twenty years ago, in September, 1883, I wrote in this Review :

Thus, on inquiring why we have no national drama at all worthy of the name, we are met first of all by the fact that the drama is not merely an art but a popular amusement, in a different sense from that in which poetry, music, and painting are popular amusements. The drama is an art, but it is also a competitor of music-halls, circuses, Madame Tussaud's, the Westminster Aquarium, and the Argyll Rooms. It is a hybrid, an unwieldy Siamese twin with two bodies, two heads, two minds, two dispositions, all of them, for the present, vitally connected. And one of these two bodies, dramatic art, is lean and pinched and starving, and has to drag about with it wherever it goes its fat, puffy, unwholesome, dropsical brother, popular amusement. And neither of them goes its own proper way in the world to its own proper end, but they twain twaddle on in a

path that leads nowhere in particular, the resultant of their several luggings and tuggings at each other.

Well, that is what I have been saying in another way in this present article. For saying it in different ways I have naturally met with constant abuse and depreciation from all whose game and interest it is to perpetuate the present sterile and unholy alliance between the English drama and popular entertainment. But now it seems that a great body of cultivated opinion in the country has turned over to the same way of thinking as myself. For what else is the meaning of the present movement, backed up by all these powerful and illustrious signatures? If that movement means anything beyond signing a paper, if it is to be pursued to any effective end, it means the separation of the English drama from popular entertainment, and its recognition as a literary art. If that idea, which is virtually the idea I have been trying to enforce all through this paper, if that idea is not to be made the basis of our action, then the sardonic cherub still sits above and mocks us, mocks and grins, mocks and grins. But with that idea firmly fixed in our minds, with that definite object in view, we may go on to inquire what course of action can be taken in accordance with it.

Two main proposals have been thrown out in a broad indefinite way. One is that a school of acting shall be forthwith established; the second and far more important proposal is that we shall have a subsidized theatre. The advocates of a subsidized theatre would doubtless agree that it should include a school of acting. The foundation of a school of acting is a very small and easy business compared with the endowment of a theatre. It may be convenient to consider the smaller proposal first.

What does a school of acting mean? Already we have several schools of acting, where pupils are trained in elocution, and after some months of lessons are

allowed to play a part in an amateur sort of a way at a minor theatre. Evidently in itself a school of acting is not a sure means of salvation for the English stage. Indeed, schools of acting, though valuable enough so far as they go, are part of our present very bad system of training actors. Let me explain, or rather illustrate, what that very bad system is.

A young man decided to become an actor. He was advised to go to one of these schools of acting. He went, and studied there for twelve months, doubtless getting some benefit therefrom, but having no opportunities of playing before the public. At the end of twelve months he was fortunate enough to obtain a speaking part of three lines in a provincial company. He played those three lines for two tours, that is, for about thirty-five weeks of the year. He was then fortunate enough to obtain a more important speaking part of some ten or twelve lines, and this he played for another year. That is, at the end of three years he had not had a quarter of the practice in his art that he would necessarily have had in a single week under the old stock system. Added to this, the mechanical repetition of an empty part, night after night, must have had a debilitating effect not only on his acting powers, but on all his mental activities. Then again, the absence of an absorbing occupation left him with all the day at leisure for loafing about in provincial towns.

Take another illustration. I had occasion to call at the theatre of a London manager. I found him in his private room, carefully going over and over the words and business of a part with a leading performer; correcting false accents, training the voice, giving instruction in the elements of elocution. That leading performer had already played that part for more than a hundred nights at a West End Theatre, and had received enthusiastic praises from the whole of the London press.

These are not very extreme cases; they are not unfair examples of our present system for training

recruits in the enormously difficult art and business of acting. Could the worst enemy of the English stage and the English drama conceive a system more ingeniously planned to make great acting, and therefore the successful production of great plays, an impossibility on our boards? So that we have rightly come to perceive that our present system of training actors is not merely hopelessly bad and ineffective—it is frankly ridiculous and farcical.

It must, however, be stated that in the photographic and phonographic reproduction of the little mannerisms and the small actualities of the street, the club, or the drawing-room, we have many fine artists on our English stage. It is when we ask for some adequate portrayal of parts that demand emotion, sustained and accomplished elocution, breadth, power, fire, imagination, intellectual divination—it is then that we discover our abject poverty. And this increasing impoverishment of our stage is the necessary result of a system that does not afford to the actors who potentially possess these higher gifts any opportunity of learning how to exercise them.

And now it is proposed to start another school of acting. If it is to get us out of our present troubles, it is clear that it must be an entirely different school of acting from those we already have. The only schools of acting that have rendered any conspicuous service to our present stage have been those of the late Sarah Thorne, Mr. Benson, and Mr. Ben Greet. And the reason that these schools have trained some valuable actors and actresses is that, in addition to lessons in elocution, they have given their pupils the opportunity of constantly playing and constantly failing in big parts. This is the only school that in the end makes valuable actors and actresses. The school we need is one that gives all promising young actors and actresses the chance of constantly grinding and sharpening their teeth on great parts. I repeat that it is daily practice before the public in constantly varied parts that makes actors

and actresses. This it is which gives the actor command over his latent forces; gives character, flexibility, resource; develops that power of holding and sustaining a play to the end which to-day is not possessed by six English actors. While it is to be remembered that the majority of these six were nurtured in the old school. And to find some means of giving this constant and varied practice to all promising recruits must surely be our first step, if any step is to be taken at all.

But it will be pointed out that the question of giving our actors varied practice is intimately connected with another question, namely, the long runs of plays. Nay, it may be said that the two questions merge into one. Well, there is no doubt that long runs are a great evil. They benefit nobody except the author and the manager. They are an evil to the actor for the reasons already given. They are a great grievance to playgoers, since long runs are responsible for the disgraceful fact that London playgoers only get the chance of seeing one, or perhaps two, of our Shakespearean and classic masterpieces in the course of a year. To the manager they are of course a godsend. In these days and under our present system long runs are a necessity to the manager if he is to keep his head above water at all. To the author long runs offer a welcome breathing time. The English playwright of to-day has to face so many chances and accidents of production; so great are the interests at stake; so uncertain are the factors; so difficult it is even when the play is written to place it with the right manager, to get the right interpreters, to catch a happy mood in the public and the press, and to meet the hundred other contingencies—such a lottery it all seems, that when at last by great luck a play has got home and is drawing our great public, it would appear to be nothing less than madness to withdraw it for no reason, and again to venture into the perilous paths of production. And while plays are regarded as mere entertainments, and are neither studied, nor read,

nor examined, nor thought of in any way except as mere pastime for a careless public; while it remains almost certain that at the end of the run the play will go into dust and oblivion along with the faded scenery and the faded dresses, why should an author consent to the curtailment of the run? He gains nothing; he exposes himself to accusing sneers of failure; he weakens his own resources and damages his reputation with playgoers. None the less it is certain that long runs are an evil. They cannot eventually benefit even the author, since as we have seen they are the one great means of defrauding him of capable interpreters.

But surely it would be an immense advantage to our drama that a modern successful play should be interpreted by the various companies of our different theatres, and by our different leading actors and actresses. What new lights would be thrown on the play! In many cases how curiously protean an organism would be revealed! How it would help to destroy the notion so injurious to the dramatist that a play once given by certain performers is then and there stereotyped, that characters once played by actors are then and there "created!" Above all, what vigorous emulation, what life, what natural healthy ambition and competition it would bring into our theatres! To-day if by any accident or mistake of production a play happens to fail, it is a dead thing, out of mind evermore. Almost as bad a fate awaits it if it prove a success, for then by the etiquette of our English stage it is supposed to be sealed and assured to the leading actor who has produced it. Why should not a healthy, friendly rivalry in the playing of modern parts be the rule of our stage? In France a very large number of the leading modern *rôles* have been played by nearly all the leading actors and actresses. Consider the number of leading parts that have been played by Sarah Bernhardt and Réjane, after having been played by other leading actresses. Why should not this excellent custom be

introduced on our English stage? By its means our baneful system of long runs would be broken up, and new life would be shot into every limb and artery of our drama. What do English actors say to my proposal—I mean the great body of English actors, who under our present system spend two-thirds of their time seeking engagements, and one-third playing the same *rôle* mechanically night after night?

But if we cannot hope that all our theatres should play a repertory, we may surely hope that the end of all this cry will be the establishment of at least one repertory theatre in London.

The second, and much more important, proposal that has been made is for the establishment of a subsidized theatre. Such a proposal includes the first proposal, since such a theatre would naturally undertake the training and supervision of our recruits. A few years ago I deprecated the too hasty building of a national theatre out of the modest purses of some six or eight of "us youth," whose chief capital was our love for the English drama, and a growing conviction that "something must be done!"

But we have made great progress towards a national theatre during the last few years; or at least we have made great progress towards the necessity for a National Theatre. We have made such progress that we seem to be irresistibly and instinctively moving towards it, drawn by hands that we cannot see, and called by whisperings from a future not very far away. I am sure that the establishment of a National Theatre should be the fervent hope, the object of every actor's, and every dramatist's, ambition. And if we can once get our root idea to catch fire and blaze, a National Theatre must follow as the night the day. I believe it is coming. Our great care must be to see that no abortive or premature attempt is made to start it on wrong lines, or under wrong management, or without sufficient security. A false step made at this moment, an unworkable scheme

started in a crude way, blundering along for a few months or years to certain disaster, would be the greatest misfortune that could just now befall the English drama. It would stand for a generation or two as a monument of warning against future attempts, and would give perennial food to scoffers and blasphemers. Therefore a thousand times better no attempt at all than one that is made without prevision, and without some reasonable assurance of success.

What are the conditions of success for a National Theatre? No matter how largely a theatre may be endowed, it cannot be a permanently successful institution unless :

(1) It is supported by and becomes the natural home of our leading modern playwrights. A building in which our classical masterpieces were played to the exclusion of modern work would soon become a dramatic museum.

(2) Nor unless those playwrights are associated with a competent body of trained actors, containing a fair proportion of players whose personalities, as well as their technique, draw the public.

(3) Nor unless the right manager were found—a man of good social standing, and also possessing the necessary literary, theatrical, and business knowledge and qualifications.

(4) Nor unless it were made a National Theatre in the true sense; unless all fads, schisms, cliques, and little fussy notoriety seekers were kept outside its portals.

(5) Unless and mainly, unless the great English play-going public can be brought to take an interest and pride in their national drama as a fine humane art, and in the building and institution that enshrine it. Here we strike back into our root idea—the idea that the best and highest pleasure the drama can offer must be perceived to be an intellectual pleasure, quite distinct in kind from the pleasure offered by mere popular entertainment. I believe there is growing up amongst us a playgoing public

sufficiently large and interested to support an institution founded on this idea. And there are good grounds for hoping that if it were wisely conducted, it would eventually become self-supporting, and render sufficient profit to secure its financial stability on its own merits.

There are different ways of providing the money-guarantee necessary to start such an undertaking.

A good-natured millionaire might possibly be persuaded to provide the funds. Unfortunately millionaires as a class are not enthusiastic lovers of the drama for its own sake. They manifest strange foibles and whims; they have strange notions about art and literature; they build themselves grotesque and futile monuments in the inane and the void. But I am of opinion that if any millionaire wished to build himself a lasting monument in the affection and homage of the English people, he could not find a surer means of gratifying his ambition than by putting down the money to build and endow a National Theatre.

Again, a repertory theatre might conceivably be subsidized by the London County Council. I should like to see municipal theatres in all our large towns. The present, however, does not seem to be a favourable moment for starting them.

The remaining way is that a National Theatre should be built and fostered by the government of England, with the approval of the majority of English citizens. It seems to me that this last would be the best, the most secure, the most creditable way of founding a National Theatre, and of nurturing a great and popular national drama. I believe that a sum of public money so expended would be one of the wisest and most economical investments that we could make. It would be the merest fleabite compared with the vast sums that are now spent—nay, that in many cases are now wasted—on public education. And yet what a potent educator a National Theatre would inevitably become if it were wisely directed.

What are the reasons for the State endowment and State recognition of the drama? They are precisely the same as those for the State endowment of the other arts, music, painting, sculpture. Indeed, seeing that the drama is the most popular of all the arts, and the most intimately connected with the daily life and conduct of the citizens, there is all the more need for its wise recognition and encouragement.

The reasons for the encouragement of art by the State could not be set forth in a clearer and plainer way than has been recently done by M. Massé in the *Chambre des Députés*. He said :

“Mais si l'État ne fait pas l'art qui est la liberté, la spontanéité même, s'il ne peut prétendre au rôle de metteur en œuvre, s'il ne saurait nous donner un poète ou un statuaire comme il nous donne un sous-préfet, s'il n'a pas à fixer une esthétique comme il formule une loi civile, s'ensuit-il qu'il n'ait rien à voir avec l'art et que celui-ci n'ait rien à en attendre, hors de n'être ni maltraité ni proscrit ?

“L'État peut, au contraire, concourir indirectement à la production de belles œuvres.

“Je dirai même qu'en tant qu'administrateur des intérêts généraux, il le doit.”

And again :

“De quelle nature est donc en matière d'art la fonction de la puissance ?

“À coup sûr elle n'est point créatrice. L'art n'est pas un service public que l'État ait mission d'assurer. Sa fonction n'est non plus ni tutélaire, ni réglementaire, ni de contrôle, ni de police. Parfois encore aujourd'hui elle a ce caractère, mais c'est là un des derniers restes de la conception qu'on se faisait jadis du rôle de la puissance en matière d'art et elle doit perdre ce caractère.

“La fonction de l'État est essentiellement une fonction auxiliaire ; il ne doit ni réglementer l'art ni le contrôler, mais l'aider et l'encourager. C'est une modeste mais utile collaboration, une coopération féconde entre toutes.”

And further :

“L'État doit, par l'éducation et par l'enseignement, s'efforcer de rendre le Beau accessible à la généralité des citoyens. Il doit aussi chercher à développer tout spécialement les arts qui, grâce à des conditions économiques nouvelles, pourront être goûtés par ceux qui jusqu'à là avaient considéré l'art comme un luxe coûteux et hors de leur portée. Embellir et égayer la vie de tous les citoyens, même les plus humbles, en leur donnant des notions d'esthétique et en ornant d'œuvres simples et belles tout les endroits où se rencontrent les citoyens—écoles, mairies, hôpitaux, salles de réunion et de conférence—telle est la conception que doit avoir de son rôle, en ce qui concerne les arts, une démocratie.”

And yet again :

“Il faut encore que l'État universalise le goût pour pénétrer dans les masses, la notion et l'émotion de la beauté, aujourd'hui propriété d'une élite orgueilleuse. Dans ce sens, il convient d'insister sur la création d'un théâtre populaire, et de l'enseignement théorique des arts à l'école, ainsi que sur les œuvres de décentralisation artistiques.”

These are the reasons that may be urged and re-urged for the establishment and endowment of an English National Theatre with the public money. What are the hindrances? Who are the hinderers? It cannot surely be the amount of money that is asked. The little State of Denmark endows its national theatre with some 20,000*l.* a year. Again, see the sums that Puritan England spends on its other enjoyments, say on racing. Inquire what amount the English theatre-going public has spent on musical comedy during the last ten years. Judging from some reports that have appeared, at a rough estimate, English theatre-goers must have spent on musical comedy in town and provinces something like five or six millions of pounds during the last ten years. That is to say, on this particular form of popular entertainment the English public has, in a few years, spent a

sum sufficient to buy an entire fleet; a sum that, capitalized, would bring in about 150,000*l.* a year, or about ten times the sum that we need to start a sane intellectual drama. Now what has the English play-going public to show for these five or six million pounds? There remain a few charming and graceful pieces of music, and the memory of much pretty dancing and singing. But for the rest? Does anything remain at all? A single line to quote? A single vital character? A single scene that faithfully pictured life? A single idea one would care to recall? A single permanent touch with humanity? A single thing that the manager or author can claim with pride, and say 'I did that'? And five or six million pounds have gone! And all those golden evenings of leisure!

O, witless debauch of grave, religious England! O, converse side of our Puritan buckler! O, undergarments of prudery! O, burden of bigotry too hard to be borne! O, systole! O, Exeter Hall! O, diastole! O, Leicester Square! O, land of blind and bitter fury against the drama! O, sanctimony! O, license! O, botchery of all our holiday hours! O, nauseous pie!

It has been rumoured, with some apparent foundation, that there are secret reasons for the enormous success of these entertainments on the lowest intellectual level at some of our fashionable theatres. Facts have been vouched for which seem to lend some colourable support to these sinister rumours. In giving them some sort of currency, which I do with all reserve and caution, I must carefully guard myself from all suspicion of malice against a most respectable class—I mean the attendants at the various cloakrooms of our theatres. If they have been partners in the practice which it is alleged has lately become prevalent at some theatres, I mean the practice of insisting that the brains of each member of the audience shall be left in the cloakroom with the other impedimenta—if the cloakroom attendants have lent themselves to this practice, and in conjunction

with clever young surgeons are actually engaged in working it every night, they surely cannot have been responsible for its introduction. The custom is of course very profitable to the theatre, but the cloakroom attendants can reap very little benefit from it, since I believe that in no case is a higher fee charged than sixpence. Therefore if any accident should occur I trust the blame will not be laid on the cloakroom attendants. In talking over the matter with the eminent surgeon, Sir Harvey Hunter, I congratulated him on the triumphant march of surgery which made such hasty operations possible. I expressed, however, a fear that some very serious injury might result from the continuance of the practice. He assured me that no permanent ill-effects were likely to befall the frequenters of these entertainments from the loss, or exchange, or misplacement of their brains. Altogether the evidence as to the frequency of these practices is conflicting. There remain, however, certain authenticated statements which are inexplicable, except on the theory that the operation does actually take place; amongst them the terrible fact that one young gentleman, who seemed to be quite rational in other respects, bragged that he had been forty-six times to one of these entertainments. I leave the matter for further investigation.

Now, if things are followed to their consequences, it matters little to our final pecuniary position as a nation, or as individuals, whether we pay this three or four or five hundred thousand a year voluntarily, or at the quest of the tax-collector. The fact for us to ponder is that the English theatre-going public does pay this enormous tax for what is allowed to be a very childish and empty form of theatrical entertainment. It is absurd to say that the English nation could not afford to pay once for all a tenth part of the sum to foster the fine and humane art of the drama. It would be a mere drop in the ocean of our national expenditure, a mere tenth of our theatrical expenditure.

But if no National Theatre can be established at present, it still remains for us to spread our root idea among English playgoers. Ideas have the advantage of being quite inexpensive.

And our root idea is this: "The separation of the English drama from popular amusement; its recognition as a fine literary art, which is not and cannot be the creature, and instrument, and tributary, and appurtenance [of the English theatre." This idea, diligently planted among English playgoers, will take root and live and spread. And meantime we may be picking ourselves out of our present slough, and climbing to some little hillock of vantage, whence we may look backward to the distant Elizabethan range with its peaks amongst the stars, and forward to the shadowy loom of giant heights that shall be scaled in days to come by other feet than ours.

NOTE.—In the absence of any recognition of the Drama by the State, I have supported the scheme for the establishment of a Shakespeare Memorial Theatre by public subscription. In the following paper I have given reasons for doubting whether the present enterprise can be brought to a successful issue, unless it is pursued in a different spirit, and on other lines. The movement should be controlled by men of letters, who have also a practical knowledge of the theatre. Such men are rare in England, and in their absence the enterprise seems now to be chiefly directed by energetic ladies, who might perhaps be more usefully and suitably employed in organizing a Charity bazaar. I have outlined a plan which may serve to put the whole undertaking on a sure basis. None the less am I persuaded that it is the business of the government to consider the great importance of this question; and to supplement the funds for the establishment of a National Theatre, as a wise and economical expenditure of public money.

VIII

THE ENGLISH NATIONAL THEATRE

August, 1912.

THE failure of the American National Theatre offers some very puzzling and thorny questions to the promoters of the English scheme. For the main end and aim of the two enterprises were the same, namely to bring the drama in each country into a continuous understanding and alliance with literature.

It may be advisable to reaffirm and establish this underlying first principle. Doubtless in England, as was the case in America, many of the promoters of a National Theatre, and most of the subscribers, have given their sympathy and help to the undertaking with no more definite idea of its object than that it proposed in some vague benevolent way to "elevate the drama." As we have seen (p. 73), however, when we ask ourselves what "elevating the drama" really means, we are driven to the conclusion that it can mean nothing but the production of such plays as will bear the test of reading as well as the test of popular success on the boards. All the standard plays in all languages and of all periods will bear this double test; and all plays of serious intention should submit to it, should, indeed, court and welcome it. And it is only by successfully passing this test that a play can be ranked as national drama worthy to be produced in a National Theatre. I am not saying that the literary test alone is sufficient, but it is the supreme one. The drama can be said to flourish only when in addition to being a popular amusement, it is also a creative literary art.

The drama may also be partly a scenic art. When, however, it allows the scene painter to provide the chief attraction, the play becomes a cheap secondary thing. Painting must always win its chief triumphs on canvas. It can give to the drama only what is transitory and perishable, its second best. It cannot give the drama its highest and most enduring achievements. The most beautiful scenery rots in a few years. Therefore, the drama is not, and cannot be, in any large or worthy way a scenic art. It is necessary to enforce this at the present moment, when there is a disposition to think that Shakespeare, with his usual superhuman foresight, wrote his plays as librettos to schemes of twentieth century theatrical decorative art. If that was really his main purpose, then his recent producers are amply justified, and the plays may be defended on the ground of affording them an excellent opportunity to make a reputation.

And henceforth Shakespeare should be studied from that point of view; as, indeed, he already seems to be in our modern theatre. Shakespeare is the best and strongest of all pegs to hang a reputation on; as Bacon has recently discovered.

But if Shakespeare did not write his plays with this main purpose, what is the value of elaborate schemes of decoration that distract the attention of the audience from the work of the dramatist? The play that makes its chief appeal on the art of the scene-painter will always be inconsiderable as an intellectual force, no matter how well it may be written.

Again, the drama may be also in part a musical art. But here, also, in any serious effort, the musician, if he gets his way, swamps the dramatist. In opera, it is mainly the composer who counts; and music, like painting, will always win its chief triumphs apart from the drama, or by conquest of it. Therefore the drama cannot and should not be mainly or considerably a musical art.

Again, the drama may call in the aid of the costumier;

but if he becomes the obvious means of attraction, a play of Shakespeare's drops to the level of opera bouffe, and the main art employed is that of dressing a shop window.

The drama is right to take advantage of all the other arts, and to use and subdue them. But it is of the first importance to note that while a great school of intellectual drama is possible with only the smallest aid from the scene-painter, the musician, and the costumier; such a school is altogether inconceivable apart from literature. It is further to be noted that in none of the great dramatic periods of the past have the scene-painter, the musician, or the costumier been of any great account. Indeed, it may be asked whether their insignificance has not been, and will not always be, one of the chief conditions of the production of great drama. It is certain that much of the best and sincerest work of the present day has been done without any great dependence on the auxiliary arts. It is probable, too, that the alivest work in the future will only use these auxiliary arts in a limited and subservient way.

For all these reasons it is plain that what the promoters of the English National Theatre have really pledged themselves to accomplish is to bring the English stage again into alliance with English literature. That is their task, though they may not be aware of it; and though, doubtless, many of the subscribers and supporters will be surprised to find themselves engaged in such an odd undertaking. So, too, were the American millionaires surprised when, after launching the American National Theatre, they discovered that the object of their undertaking was none other than to bring the American stage into alliance with American literature. When they discovered what was the real object of their enterprise, they dropped it.

Look all round the matter; view it from all sides; try to imagine any other main aim for a National Theatre to pursue, and it will be found that when the vague idea

of "elevating the drama" is translated into practice, it means the union of the drama with literature, and cannot be twisted to mean anything much besides.

Now whether the English scheme succeeds or fails, it must be an advantage for its promoters to have a clear understanding of what they are setting out to do; and for the subscribers to have a clear understanding of what they are paying their money to support. Therefore it seems to be a fitting moment to consider the whole position of the English National Theatre in the light of the American failure, and to see what profitable experience can be gained therefrom. That failure was due in some measure to the size of the theatre, and to its unsuitability for the production of intellectual modern drama alongside spectacular Shakespearean plays.

The first question, then, that is prompted by the American defeat is whether it is possible to build a theatre whose size and arrangements will permit the advantageous and successful production alike of Shakespeare, and of the best modern work? Will not one or the other have to go by the wall? Would it be possible to build a quite small theatre for modern plays under the same roof with the Shakespearean theatre? The smaller theatre would be very useful for rehearsals, and for the all-important work of training actors.

Or can we develop a new Shakespearean convention, making it possible to play him effectively in a theatre not too large for modern social plays? The present Shakespearean convention, which may be called the Irving convention, is manifestly wearing out and is approaching its end. Fine and memorable and courageous work has been done under it; but by and by it will be seen to have had its absurd aspects, in the same way that it now seems absurd to us that Garrick should have played Lear in a full-bottom wig.

In talk and manner all Shakespeare's characters are Elizabethan. Inwardly and spiritually the most of them do mainly belong to no country and no age, but only to

Western humanity at large. If an archæologically correct tartan is essential to Macbeth, so equally is an antique Scotch accent. When Polixenes and Camillo and Perdita appear at a sixteenth-century sheepshearing in Warwickshire, hard by the sea-coast of Bohemia, and contemporaneously with a consultation of the Delphic oracle; when Dogberry wanders from his native Buckinghamshire village and unaccountably turns up in Messina, there is a woeful dissolution of chronology and geography; and it really doesn't much matter what dresses they wear, or what scenes form their background, so long as these are not obtrusive, and are not glaringly inharmonious with the text. Archæologically correct they cannot be.

An Elizabethan dress would befit nearly all Shakespeare's characters. And Elizabethan scenery might not be inappropriately used for most of his scenes. The present exact archæologic and scenic dressing of Shakespeare's plays, is often nothing but a costly and tiresome demonstration of Shakespeare's carelessness and ignorance of local colour. It must never be forgotten that Shakespeare has done a good deal of his own landscape painting. What lover of Shakespeare would not rather hear a beautiful delivery of one of his broad landscape speeches, than see it superfluously illustrated by the finest of modern scene painters?

Might it not be possible to establish a Shakespearean convention that would enormously reduce the present cost of Shakespearean production by making a few sets of unobtrusive scenery and dresses available for all of his plays—a convention that would be quite as much in keeping with the letter and spirit of the text, as our present elaborate but really incongruous convention? The scenes and dresses could be designed with great beauty and taste and richness. The fact that they were not very distinctive, and that they might be recognized as old friends, would serve to remind the spectator that scenery should never be

more than something quite subservient and secondary in the background. After a mere glance he would be able to give his attention to the essential matters in a Shakespearean play ; the correct and beautiful delivery of the verse ; the portrayal of the characters ; the swelling rhythmical march, like some deep organ triumph on the vox humana, of the tremendous emotional and passionate speeches.

I throw out this suggestion for consideration, without wishing to depreciate the beautiful and gorgeous settings which have lately decorated our English theatre ; and which in themselves, and considered as pictures rather than as drama, have provided feasts of colour and moving pageantry for playgoers. And perhaps to-day the great public cannot be drawn to Shakespeare at all without the aid of very elaborate pictorial treatment. But our eyes being more easily attracted and stimulated than our minds, it is certain that any elaborate pictorial representation of Shakespeare's scenes tends to monopolize our attention, and to keep it from dwelling upon those aspects and qualities of Shakespearean drama which give it immortal distinction and charm, and which make it better worth production than a modern costume play. Unless these aspects and qualities are made of the first importance, and are kept quite to the front ; unless all through we are made well aware that we are listening to great poetry, great philosophy of life, great expositions of human character, we might almost as well be seated at some piece of cape-and-sword fustian.

It is questionable whether any class of play is not seen to the best advantage under those conditions and conventions which most nearly approach the conditions and conventions of its original production. Apparently a Shakespearean performance was always kept well within the three hours, and perhaps was often over in less than two and a half. And it is astounding how much he gains as a playwright, when his plays are taken

right through, without waits between the acts. Most probably Shakespeare would be found to give the keenest delight to those well versed in him, in a theatre and under conditions and conventions bearing a near likeness to the theatre of his own day; and where the scenery and dresses would be always unobtrusive. But this would be for the elect only. I recently took a Shakespearean student to see a very costly and elaborate representation of a Shakespearean play. Coming out he said: "Yes, that's very good in its own way, and I've enjoyed myself very much. But when are we going to get a bit of Shakespeare?"

Doubtless, however, the general playgoing public will never be Shakespearean adepts, and will always have to be captured by the conventions which they understand and are familiar to them. Happily Shakespeare lends himself to many widely differing conventions; and our present convention, if in many ways alien to the spirit of the poet, gives the general public a liberal education in others' matters, and offers them spectacles of rare beauty.

Before the national theatre is built it would be wise for its promoters to announce what Shakespearean policy they mean to pursue; and especially what Shakespearean convention they mean to adopt. Surely not that of a recent very beautiful production of "Romeo and Juliet" where the heavy scenery demanded that the second act should be chopped up into four acts, with long waits between each; where the producer was proved to be a man of great taste, and the author to be a sorry disconnected playwright; where all the heat and movement of the action were lost, and the players' best efforts rendered of none effect.

If such a comparatively simple Shakespearean convention as I glanced at could be established, it might be possible to build a National Theatre that should not be too small for an effective representation of Shakespeare, and not too large for an effective representation of a

modern realistic play. This comparatively inexpensive convention would also encourage frequent Shakespearean productions in our large towns, and would easily adapt itself to municipal theatres, when these shall be established. By its aid, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, and other large cities might, in the matter of Shakespearean reproductions, grow to appear less contemptible than they now appear when compared with second-rate German towns.

And if, as may be hoped, our National Theatre, when it is built, should enter into harmonious working relations with municipal and repertory theatres, any particular scene, necessary for the production of some particular play, such as the Forum scene in *Julius Cæsar*, would be available for them all.

In this way the cost of production would be much reduced. English playgoers generally would be provided with the means of seeing Shakespeare, in place of seeing Shakespearean scenery with a star actor or two. They would also be able to see a range of Shakespearean plays during the year, instead of one or two of the most popular that happened to have been longest on the shelf. A large body of playgoers would perhaps get to know Shakespeare the dramatist and poet; and would approach him from a wholly different point of view from that of the crowds who now gape at a Shakespearean spectacle which is, in many respects, alien to the spirit and methods of the poet.

When all these considerations are carefully weighed, it may be thought advisable to build a moderate-sized theatre which, with some occasional compromise, would accommodate both Shakespeare and modern social drama.

But Shakespeare will always demand large broad imaginative acting, and will always be most advantageously seen in a theatre of ample dimensions. He should not submit to a compromise. Further, the idea of a National Theatre implies a lofty and spacious

building, which would dwarf into nullity or insignificance the studied smallness and quietness of modern realistic drama and modern realistic acting; and would obliterate their most suggestive and subtle effects. These considerations seem to urge the desirability of annexing a small theatre to the larger Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. It is a matter of great importance and will doubtless be well considered before any decision is taken.

In any case the entire policy of the National Theatre with regard to its treatment of Shakespeare and the modern drama respectively, should be most carefully weighed and settled and announced before the building is designed. For the ultimate success of the enterprise will depend upon the clear conception and vigorous execution of a broad comprehensive national scheme, giving a warm and equal shelter and encouragement alike to Shakespeare and to the modern drama. And this policy must be definitely outlined and formulated before a stone of the building is laid; otherwise we are likely to get a theatre whose size, structure and appointments will be suitable neither to Shakespeare nor to the modern drama.

It may perhaps be argued that the modern drama is a negligible thing, that may be left out of consideration altogether.

It will be remembered that the modern English drama was ruled out at the Coronation festivities last year on a curiously amusing plea, which implied that there were so many modern English dramatists, and they had produced so much good work, that it would be invidious to choose between them. This would have been welcome good news to many of us, if we could have accepted the plea as anything but a disingenuous excuse for shelving the modern drama altogether. I do not suppose that English dramatic authors are spotlessly free from jealousy and envy, but I am persuaded that most of us would have gladly welcomed the production of a representative piece

of modern work by a living brother author. It would have seemed strange if the plea had been advanced for ruling out our representative modern actors, that as so many of them reached the level of genius, it would be invidious to choose between them; and for that reason it would be advisable on such an occasion as the Coronation to seek out a few decayed survivors of Macready's days and exhibit them as showing what English acting could accomplish in 1911. This was the plea advanced for excluding the modern drama.

Mr. William Watson has pointed out that English poetry was also coldly treated at the Coronation. But it is surely advisable to arrange Coronation festivities on the level of the general literary and artistic tastes of the populace—which are sufficiently in evidence. And it may well be, that after great deliberation and foresight, the occasion was wisely deemed to offer a fitting opportunity for a demonstration that England can get on very well without poetry, and without any living modern drama; and that any representation of arts so insignificant in our national economy would strike an intrusive and discordant note in the general festivity. This is, of course, merely respectful conjecture on my part. It is possible that no such leading idea governed the arrangement of the Coronation festivities, and that no such demonstration was intended. But it must be allowed that, intended or not, the demonstration was made, and was eminently successful.

English poets will doubtless find consolation in a quiet chuckle over certain passages of Shelley, Byron and Landor; while English dramatists need merely ask, with all becoming humility, whether Elizabeth and Louis the Fourteenth gave or received the more honour by their patronage of the living drama of their day. And two or three lines from Coleridge may fitly sum up the question—"The darkest despotisms of the Continent have done more for the growth and elevation of the fine arts than the English government. Without this sort of

encouragement and patronage such arts will never come into great eminence."

The whole matter would not have been worth mention or even thought, except that kindred influences and tastes may prevail when the question of the policy of the National Theatre with regard to the modern drama comes up for consideration and determination. Enough has been said to show that its total or partial exclusion, its relegation to a secondary place, will inevitably mean the failure of the scheme as an operative fruitful National Movement. The claim of any age to possess a drama rests upon the continuous production of fresh living plays, with the classic masterpieces used as guides, and models, and correctives.

The failure of the American National Theatre offers other lessons and warnings to the promoters of the English enterprise, and an inquiry into the causes of that failure will doubtless furnish them with matters for deep consideration before they commit themselves and their subscribers to a definite policy. There was plenty of money behind the American scheme; indeed there seemed to be a prevalent notion that money would carry it through. When Simon the sorcerer offered Peter money for the purchase of religious gifts he met with the rebuke: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right." The same rebuke awaits those who think that money alone will bring into existence an English national drama. The endowment of a handsome building will be of little avail, while the tastes and ideas of the great body of playgoers remain on their present level. The drama must always be to a large extent a popular art; and at present the Gaiety Theatre and the Coliseum Music Hall are our true national theatres; seeing that they and their like adequately minister to the wants, and meet the tastes of the vast majority of English playgoers. And it seems not

impossible that universal moving-picture palaces may be the next expression of this great nation's desire for dramatic entertainment.

Is it worth while to start by building Canterbury Cathedral, while our converts are so few in number, and while the majority of them are bewildered with eccentric doctrines and heresies? Ought not the start to be made in another direction and in another spirit?

For in spite of all, unquestionably the idea of a national drama and a National Theatre is taking root, and is growing up amongst the more thoughtful and inquiring sections of playgoers. The danger is that a rash and ill-considered scheme may be prematurely rushed through and like the American scheme, come to grief from want of wide popular support.

The publication of Sir John Hare's letter in 1904 led to the establishment of an Academy of Dramatic Art, and to the formation of a committee to promote the erection of a National Theatre as a memorial to Shakespeare. The Academy of Dramatic Art, under the supervision of Mr. Kenneth Barnes, is doing hard and useful work in training young actors and actresses, and has furnished some valuable recruits to the stage. Under our present conditions, it is perhaps as good a training school as can be obtained. But it cannot give its pupils the constant practice before the public, which the old stock companies gave. I suppose that Mrs. Kendal, Ellen Terry, and Lady Bancroft had played more numerous and more varied parts before they were eighteen, than a modern actress will play during her life. Thus on the threshold of their careers they were already the possessors of a seasoned technique.

In a following article written in 1901 (see page 237) I outlined a plan which offered to beginners the opportunity for that wide and constant practice which, building on natural gifts, makes great and accomplished actors and actresses. Valuable as schools for acting may be at the very beginning of an actor's career, they can

never take the place of acting itself as a means of tuition and development; and as a correction of the faults, the awkwardness and the self-consciousness of the amateur.

It is allowed that the training of young actors will be one of the primary duties of a National Theatre, especially the training of Shakespearean actors. Now with our present material it will take at least ten years to train a school of actors to speak blank verse.

The scheme I sketched in 1901 is on the lines of what a National Theatre may be expected and asked to provide for beginners. But the completion of the National Theatre, and its establishment in working order, cannot be looked for in any immediate future. The public subscriptions, although they reach a handsome sum, are not within any measurable distance of furnishing the necessary five hundred thousand pounds. It is, however, reasonable to hope that a vigorous imperial appeal in the year of Shakespeare's Tercentenary will result in placing the desired amount in the hands of the trustees. But before this can be obtained, great efforts will have to be made, and the movement must be kept continually before the public, who will else relax their interest, and tighten their purse-strings. With these considerations before us, it is advisable to show the public that progress is being made.

The annual interest on the sum already in the trustees' hands would float a school of acting in public, something on the lines I have sketched. The Academy of Dramatic Art could be taken over as it stands, and made a most valuable home for the crucial experiments which it is necessary to make before the National Theatre can be started on a secure basis. In Mr. Kenneth Barnes we have a cultivated and experienced director who could be trusted to work such a scheme as a temporary half-way house to the National Theatre. A repertory could be chosen and performances could be constantly given.

And here again in the matter of plays the opportunity offers itself to make experiments which would be of great service to the National Theatre whenever it shall be built, and would tend to clear the way for its successful and popular working on a sound financial basis.

The American National Theatre started with an ambitious production of Shakespeare, and within a short time, from lack of a carefully chosen repertory of plays that would successfully appeal to the public on some moderately high intellectual level, was ignominiously reduced to bringing in cheap and vulgar attractions that laughed at all its pretensions and aspirations. Will not some such fate await the English National Theatre, unless it opens with a fairly extensive repertory of plays that have already proved themselves to be successful in the theatre; and have actually made money for the manager?

Now is the time to provide such a repertory; and the scheme I have suggested offers the opportunity of doing it at a comparatively trifling expense, and without risking the prestige of the National Theatre. Countless plays have been successful in the English Theatre during the last generation. These are already shown to have the prime quality of being attractiveactable money-making plays. Most of them are, however, outside literature altogether; indeed many of them are blatant with ignorance and contempt of literature, and would disgrace a National Theatre. Some of them, if not to be regarded as literary masterpieces, do yet put forward modest claims to consideration in the study; a good number of them, if indifferent to literature, and devoid of serious pretensions to it, are yet not offensive to it, and might be allowed a temporary place in the repertory.

The men of letters who are already engaged in promoting the Shakespeare Memorial Scheme, such as Mr. Edmund Gosse, Sir Sidney Lee, Mr. Sidney Low and others, might invite those distinguished men

of letters and Shakespearean scholars who are at present outside the scheme, to join them in forming a committee to examine such popular and assured money-making successes of the last twenty years as could advance a claim for inclusion in the repertory of the National Theatre. Seeing that these plays have already passed the test of popular theatrical success, this committee need only judge them from the standpoint of literature. Is it objected that some such sifting by men of letters is not necessary before the repertory of the National Theatre is decided upon? Then it is proposed that the repertory shall include plays which will be likely to meet with the condemnation of men of letters, and will therefore tend to lower the standard of production, and bring the theatre into disrepute. Is it not time that English literature should be allowed some say and weight in the affairs of the English theatre?

From this committee of literature theatrical managers and actors should be rigidly excluded, because the theatrical merits of the plays are not in question, and because as all experience proves, theatrical managers are very indifferent judges of literature.

But when certain plays have been passed by the literary committee as worthy of production in a National Theatre, then theatrical managers might be cordially invited to aid in their casting and production; and here their advice and help would be invaluable. If theatrical managers refuse their co-operation on these terms, will it not be a confession that they do not wish the National Theatre to have a high literary standard; that what they really wish is that the English drama shall continue to be engineered by and for the English theatre, and to merely theatrical ends? Will it be wise for theatrical managers to make such a confession? And will not the choosing of the repertory of the National Theatre by theatrical managers inevitably destroy all hopes of founding an English National drama on any higher level than our present one?

I am not seeking to introduce contention amongst the promoters of the scheme ; I am merely pointing out that a contention of aims and ambitions and tastes is certain to arise. Is it not better that all these things should be foreseen and, so far as may be, adjusted and harmonized before enormous sums of money are spent, and before the success of the undertaking is jeopardized in the clash of contending views and interests? It is understood that the American National Theatre had scarcely opened its doors, before this antagonism of views and interests between the theatrical and the dramatic elements of the undertaking became apparent. This antagonism, latent in the production of any serious dramatic work, is bound to appear at some time in the working of the English scheme ; and a foreknowledge of it may tend to prevent its evil and perhaps fatal operation at a critical and dangerous moment. A preliminary discussion in which both sides could put forward their arguments might lead to some understanding of the difficulties and an avoidance of some of the worst pitfalls.

The fate of the American National Theatre is a warning to the English promoters not to open their doors without having provided themselves with a repertory of plays likely to be popular, and worthy also of production in a building which calls itself the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

The provisional and experimental scheme which I have here outlined offers a possible means of providing such a repertory ; it also offers means of training a school of actors and actresses who could render the plays to advantage. And it does this without encroaching on the permanent capital of the undertaking. The performance in a tentative experimental way by differing casts of actors, of such plays as were passed by the literary committee would indicate those of them that might be passed into the repertory of the future National Theatre, as likely to add to its

resources and to establish its popularity with the great public.

I entreat the promoters of the English National Theatre to consider whether hard and anxious experimental work of the kind I have indicated is not necessary to save the enterprise from failure. I entreat English men of letters not to desert the enterprise, but to assert their right of judgment in the selection of plays. Unless a wise selection is made, and unless experimental work is carried over a period, say of ten years, there is the greatest risk of a humiliating fiasco.

Appeals have been made to the public for the last four years, and in view of the continued appeals which will have to be made for some years to come, it is necessary to do something to keep alive an interest in the scheme. My proposal, if it could be successfully worked, would render this important service. If it cannot be successfully worked, what hope can there be for the success of the larger scheme ?

Intending and possible subscribers would see that something was being done ; and in this way additional contributions would doubtless be encouraged which might repay the annual interest advanced by the trustees. Past subscribers would have the satisfaction of already getting something for their money. The best seats might be allotted to subscribers, and takings would of course go to the general fund. Established dramatists might reasonably be expected to give the free use of their old favourite plays. The repertory need not be confined to plays already produced. Young and rising dramatists might be afforded an opening for promising work. Favourite and experienced actors might be engaged to take parts, and to coach the younger actors. The whole enterprise would of course be tentative and experimental ; and its success, as in every theatrical venture, would depend on the way it was managed. The amount risked would be small compared with the amount it is proposed to risk

on the larger scheme; while it would be always working towards the realization of the larger scheme, and accumulating valuable experience. It is an easy and comparatively inexpensive way of approaching a most difficult undertaking. If the necessary capital should not be forthcoming for the realization of the larger scheme, it would prevent its being indefinitely shelved, and ultimately failing from want of funds. Indeed this temporary half-way house to a National Theatre could be kept going until the necessary amount has been subscribed for the larger scheme. On all these counts it seems to be worth the consideration of the committee and the trustees of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. For the moment the building of the actual theatre need trouble us no more than the design of the Vatican troubled Saint Peter. We should have had a National Theatre long ago if there had been any widely-spread love and knowledge of the drama in our nation.

The little cherub who sits aloft to report on human futilities is now perched on the parapet of the Millionaires' Theatre in New York, and there mocks and grins, mocks and grins, mocks and grins. I think I see him preening his wings, and preparing to hover maliciously over the ascending scaffolds of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

IX

THE DRAMA AND REAL LIFE

A lecture delivered at Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, on
Saturday evening, November 13th, 1897.

I ONCE took a country acquaintance to the play; it was the first time that he had ever been inside a theatre. I found a great pleasure in watching his delight, his childish innocent acceptance of it all as real downright fact, happening before his eyes. He enjoyed himself thoroughly until towards the end of the evening, when some of the characters, one of whom was supposed to be very hungry, sat down to a meal. Have you ever watched a stage meal? You know it takes something like half an hour to eat an ordinary meal. It ought never to take less, and at certain city banquets it takes considerably more. But on the stage if we were to take half an hour over a meal and eat heartily, the audience would either boo and hiss, which is the English way of showing disapproval in a theatre; or they would quietly and politely melt away, which is the American way of showing disapproval. No audience in this world would endure five minutes spent entirely in eating, much less half an hour. Further, the actor being obliged all the while to carry on the story of the piece by dialogue; and to do this in so distinct a voice that he can be heard by the furthest gallery boy (who will else express his dissatisfaction in the English fashion)—being obliged, I say, to talk very distinctly all the while, the actor cannot give much attention to chewing. Therefore, however hungry a

stage character may be, even if he be starving, it is impossible for him to eat much. As a matter of fact, even a starving man on the stage eats scarcely anything at all. We get a confectioner to make a very light sponge cake in the shape and colour of a chicken or of a beef steak, and so the actor partakes of meat that literally melts in his mouth. But any one who takes the trouble to watch a stage meal will see that it is the most barefaced pretence. Now my country friend had watched the play with the greatest delight, had laughed at all the antique jokes and tricks of the comedian, had contentedly accepted the most astonishingly impossible characters, and had all the while persuaded himself that he was seeing a fact, an actuality, a bit of real life. But when it came to the dinner, when he saw a starving man and other people with average appetites sit down and make the merest pretence of eating, and get it all over in less than five minutes, there came to him a sad awaking from his illusion. He felt that he had been cheated. He could see that the theatre was not real. He was not a connoisseur of character; the most impossible heroism, and the most impossible villainy had pleased him; the stalest old jokes, the funny impossible tricks of the comedian, had sent him into shrieks of laughter. It had all been so delightful, so *real*, till that dinner came. That dinner disturbed him for the remainder of the evening.

Now incidentally the behaviour of my country friend illustrates the general attitude of the average English playgoer towards the drama. I do not say that the average playgoer is quite so innocent or ignorant as my country friend, but he makes the same mistakes; he equally misunderstands the relation of the drama to real life. He mistakes it for real life. In a former lecture I gave here I showed you why the drama should never be mistaken for real life, why such a way of looking at it leads to perpetual and increasing

disillusion, leads to the *reductio ad absurdum*, that the only people who can take a delight in the drama are those who know little or nothing about it. I do not want to go over that ground again. You must grant me what I claim, that the drama should never be mistaken for real life. If you are inclined to challenge me on that point, I will refer you to what I have written in my paper "On being rightly amused at the theatre."

But my country friend not only made the natural mistake of the uncultivated playgoer in supposing the drama to be real life, but he further totally misunderstood in what relation the drama stands to real life. And in this regard he is representative of the vast number of English playgoers of the present day. But you will say, "Is it not the end and purpose of playing to hold the mirror up to Nature, to show the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure? Is not the test of fidelity to nature, fidelity to reality, the final test which must and will be applied to all plays?"

I answer that fidelity to the great permanent realities of life; not to passing and casual occurrences; not to small and arid facts, is the final test which will be applied to plays, to novels, to poetry, to all art that deals with the portrayal of human life.

I will try to show you why the drama cannot be real life; why it must, while trying its hardest to portray real life, be always something quite different from real life.

First of all there is the impossibility of coincidence in time. This was the difficulty that disturbed my friend. He knew that it ought to take at least some twenty minutes to eat a dinner; and the fact that the hungry man did not take something like that time convicted the whole play of being a sham, an imposture. This "time difficulty" is the chief difficulty of the playwright. How little it touches the novelist, who, in a stroke of a pen, can say that the man took half an hour over his dinner, and the thing is done!

The whole art of playwriting is beset with restrictions, limitations, and conventions that the novelist knows nothing of. You would not think of comparing the dancing or running of a man who is quite free, with the dancing or running of a man who is laden with fetters on hands and feet. Yet playwrights, compared with novelists, are so handicapped by space and time limitations and difficulties alone (to say nothing of other conventions) that it is just as fair to make a comparison between them as to make the one I have just named.

The "time difficulty" is the playwright's heaviest fetter when once he has mastered the primary convention of his art—to tell a story by means of dialogue. Take the dinner business I have named. We will suppose the dinner to be a necessary part of the story; the hungry man had to be fed, and you, the audience, had to see him fed. Now, either he must take twenty minutes or half an hour over the business, and give you and my country friend the impression that you are seeing a bit of real life; or he must hurry up, throw a bit of sponge-cake chicken down his throat, and convince you of the unreality of the whole thing. Is there any third course? Yes, it is for you to frankly accept the thing as a make-believe, a convention, something that is not real life and does not claim to be. But if once you accept this principle, where does it land you? Follow me and I'll show you.

Nature at every moment and in every land spreads out before you a web of human life, so vast, so complex, so apparently inconsistent, so fortuitous, so bewildering, so fantastic, so multifarious, so incomprehensible, so incommensurable, that one glance at it is enough to cover the playwright with confusion, fill him with despair, and send him empty home, convinced of the hopelessness of ever attempting to do anything like *that*. But it isn't his business to do anything like *that*. It is his business to select from that mass a few

characters, frame them in a story, and tell you as much as he can of them, piecing together his observation and his experience, and making of them a family group quite of his own. He takes them clean out of that real world and puts them into a world of his own; preserving at the same time all that he thinks is most characteristic, most vital, most enduring; painting them as faithfully as he can; and, while trying to make them distinct individuals, yet trying to make them types too; and also trying to shoot his own philosophy of life and views of men and the world through them and from behind them; trying to make those dozen characters, just for the time, the whole sum and substance and volume of humanity.

Now, in doing this the playwright, having once learnt his technique, is hampered chiefly by conditions of time. He wants, say, to put before you a certain character, and he has imagined certain leading incidents in this character's life, certain situations, certain dramatic moments and episodes. Now, although there are dramatic situations and moments in the lives of all of us, yet they are few and far between; they are very much the exception, and not the rule. Take your own life. Glancing back at it, you can see certain interesting situations, certain moments that you think would be interesting if represented on the stage. Look into your own heart. You will find there reigning passions, habits, ways of thinking, ways of looking at life, springs of action. But these are not constantly apparent in your deeds and expressions. It is only rarely that they appear on the surface; it is only at certain moments, moments of crisis, of supreme emotion, that they are laid bare—even to yourself. Now these are the things that the dramatist has to display; these are the only things that are worth displaying. But they are the rare things; they are not of everyday occurrence. Yet they are the vital things, the things that make you individual, that show your

essential character, that make you interesting to an audience. Well, the dramatist has to select and to display these exceptional things, and to leave out the others, the ordinary, sordid, everyday, inessential, non-characteristic things. What follows from this process of selection? The dramatist has at the most two hours and three-quarters to portray all that is essential in the lives of some dozen characters, to portray what Nature takes some hundreds of years to portray. Well then, the more of these essential things the dramatist has seized, the more he has crammed his play with vital moments, vital passions, vital marks and signs of character, the less his play must be like real everyday life as we see it. If he has drawn your character with insight and with decision; if he has portrayed all in your life that is worth portrayal; if he has taken the essential moments of your life, the essential notes of your character, and put them all into that hour, or thereabouts, then that hour cannot be anything like any one single hour of your life. It must be something that is startlingly unlike your real life, as you live it every day and every hour. There is no escaping from this paradox. The more a dramatist fills his plays with the essential verities of life and character, the less he is like real life as it strikes the careless observer. The more he fills his play with things that are illustrative of life and character as a whole, the less his play must be like any two or three hours that were ever spent by any group of beings on this earth.

I put this "time difficulty" first, because it is the dramatist's chief stumbling-block in trying to give his play the illusion of reality. When certain great passions or supreme moments are thus exhibited in rapid sequence, the play always has some appearance of unreality. And this is especially the case in modern plays, where the scene is not changed during an act. A playwright may violate every law of character, defy all probability of situation, outrage all logic and

consistency of story, and yet not be found out by the average English playgoer, if he cheats him with small and obvious facts, and presents an outward appearance of being like "real life." While, if he presents the salient features of a strong story in an evidently more rapid sequence than they could occur in real life, he is probably accused of having written melodrama. Now the framework of every strong and moving play that was ever written is a melodrama. The framework of "Hamlet" is frank melodrama. The framework of "Macbeth" is frank melodrama. The framework of "Edipus" is frank melodrama. In passing from this part of my subject I will give you a rule to judge whether or not a play should be called melodrama, using the word in a contemptuous sense. When you see a play of stirring scenes and situations, do not ask yourself whether they occur at an impossibly rapid rate—they are sure to do that if the play is interesting—but ask yourself how far they are rooted in and spring from character; how far they are allied to the exhibition and development of character; how much real, living human character you have seen displayed and illustrated in these strong situations. Strong scenes and situations that are filled with puppets of the stage, are rightly called melodrama. But strong scenes and situations that exhibit fresh and living human characters are not justly called melodrama, merely because, for the convenience of the spectator, they are placed before him in an impossibly rapid sequence, and to that extent give the impression of unreality.

But the dramatist has another great difficulty, compared with the novelist. He is not only hampered with what I have called the "time difficulty." He has also a terrible "space difficulty." Consider how easily a novelist can shift his scene. A single stroke of the pen does it, and he can do it as often as he pleases—a dozen times in a single page if he thinks it necessary.

And however often he does it, there is no feeling of disillusion in the reader. How terribly handicapped is the dramatist in this respect! In a play, especially in a play of modern life, it is not advisable to change a scene during an act. I am not a great stickler for this convention of unity of place. Speaking broadly I would say, "Change your scene as often as the conduct of your story requires it—a dozen times in an act if necessary." Still, it does disturb the illusion of reality if there are constant changes of scene in an act; and it would have to be some paramount consideration, involving the destruction of an important link of my story, or of some important exhibition of character, that would induce me to change a scene during the progress of an act. Yet this "space difficulty" is almost as heavy a handicap to the dramatist as the "time difficulty." We have not only to cram all the important events of a lifetime into an hour, but we have to nail our characters together on a plank some twenty-five feet square, and make them do all their deeds and show all their characters on that identical spot. I hope you will see how much this adds to the dramatist's difficulties. It multiplies them in cubic proportion. Every character has to be there on the spot, has to be supplied with some reasonable excuse for being there exactly at the moment when the exigencies of your story require him, and has to be supplied with an equally reasonable excuse for taking himself off at the precise moment when the exigencies of the story require him to "get out." Think of this "space difficulty." It scarcely troubles the novelist. The playwright is oppressed by it at every moment.

I remember one popular play where all the characters turn up in a remote corner of Australia in the last act. It was a very remarkable coincidence, was it not, that some twelve or fourteen people who had been comfortably established in England in the earlier acts, should all of them happen to drop in at a hut in Western

Australia exactly in the same half-hour? If you are seasoned playgoers, I am sure you will have met with equally remarkable coincidences; you will remember plays where by some irresistible magnetism all the characters are driven to some one spot exactly at the right moment. The drama is full of such coincidences. Real life is not. Real life is as sparing of these coincidences in space as of coincidences in time. I have been watching real life very carefully for more than thirty years, and it has never offered to me any one single scene that could be put on the stage. If you watch real life you will never find all the characters of any story gathered on one spot, and there performing actions and discoursing in language that would explain to an intelligent spectator the history of their lives, or the history of any one of their lives. If you carefully compare any drama that was ever written with real life, you will find the likeness breaking down at every moment. It cannot be sustained for the shortest scene. At every moment real life is fragmentary, inconsequent, disjointed; it never tells a story by implication, as a dramatist always does. Nature scarcely for a moment uses the methods, or copies the aims of the dramatist. And the dramatist can never be like real life—chiefly for these two main reasons that I have pointed out—firstly, he has to concentrate all his action within the merest fraction of the time that would be taken in real life; secondly, he has to concentrate all his action in a few small, definite, stationary scenes. And the necessity of thus concentrating his action brings him every moment into conflict with the thousand inessential facts and worthless trivialities which are the adjuncts and setting of real life everywhere and at all times. There is no way of representing these trivialities on the stage; they have no place there; they merely bore the ordinary playgoer and take away the time and patience which he is ready to give to weightier matters. So little is it the business of the drama to copy real life, that the playwright who

tries to do so only finds at the end of his task that he has amassed a heap of worthless facts which, after all, are only a small proportion of the whole; he may have seized a few outward resemblances to real life, but he has probably missed all the great verities and enduring realities of life and character. And the more of the great things he has seized and packed into his two hours' traffic of the stage, the less his play will be like real life; the more it will be apt to strike the ordinary unthinking spectator as forced, unreal, unnatural, and melodramatic. I told you of my country friend who was disturbed because he could not see a real dinner really and truly eaten on the stage. He is a type of the ordinary uneducated playgoer, who, when he goes to the theatre, will comfortably swallow the greatest falsehoods in the story and characters, if he can only retain a few small commonplace illusions. He will accept the most outrageously impossible story, the most impossible development of character, if only you throw him a few odd bits of cheap realism. Every now and then we get a dramatic movement which professes to be a return to Nature, to truth, to real life, but which always ends in showing the playgoer some perhaps neglected, but quite trumpery, aspect of life, or character, or stage furniture. Seeing that the drama can only give the spectator the barest fraction of real life; and seeing that this bare fraction in vogue on the stage at that time, does not include real cabs, some pioneer in the drama arises, and rightly divining that a certain number of playgoers will be solaced and edified by the sight of a real cab, places one on the stage, and satisfies the hunger of that portion of the public for real life. At another time, seeing that certain petty tricks of manner and little trivialities of social life have been neglected, some pioneer arises in the drama, and places these on the stage, and thus satisfies the hunger of another portion of the playgoing public for real life. At another time, seeing that zymotic diseases have been overlooked by

the modern playwright, some pioneer in the drama arises, and rightly divining that a certain number of playgoers will be solaced and edified by an exhaustive description—say of erysipelas or small-pox—some pioneer in the drama arises and satisfies the hunger of that portion of the public for real life. In spite of apparently wide differences between all these movements; in spite of the different aims and tempers of the men who lead them, they all make the same mistake; they all attempt the impossible feat of making the stage like real life in the sense of copying real life; they get a little nearer to real life in one direction only to throw themselves more hopelessly out in another; they insist on certain mean inessential, or ignoble facts and features of life, and miss its unity, its largeness, its dignity, its classicality.

I will give you an instance of what I mean. Perhaps the greatest story that was ever told on the stage, and certainly the finest example of dramatic construction, are to be found in the "Edipus Tyrannus" of Sophocles. The most tremendous national issues are at stake, and these are bound up in the awful and fateful story of the hero and his mother-wife. Step by step the tragic story marches to its close; every moment developing some new situation of terror and pathos, or showing some new stretch of the great net wherein fate has entangled the king and his family and the whole nation. I will not attempt to tell you that marvellous story. To give you a correct idea of it, would take more time than is allotted for the whole of my lecture, more time than to read the whole of the play. But imagine a story wherein the fate of the whole nation is involved in the domestic history of a single man and his family. Suppose that family to be the highest and noblest in the land, and the man himself to be a great wise king at the height of his fame and power. Suppose the history of that family to be the most touching, the most terrible, the most strange and wonderful, that the brain of man has conceived.

Suppose that story to be told you in the most beautiful language, accompanied by great sweeping musical choruses. Suppose all that to be done in one single scene, in one single act, of something over one hour and less than two—say about one-third of the length of "Hamlet." It is the most perfect specimen of dramatic workmanship—but it is not like real life. There is the whole history of the great king and his family, his whole life up to that point, fast locked with all the attendant national hopes and fears, fast locked with the destiny of the whole people—all this is placed before you in one eventful hour, on one eventful spot. Nature would have taken many years and the breadth of the land to do that. Sophocles does it in a little over an hour on one spot. But if this, an acknowledged dramatic masterpiece of the whole civilized world, is utterly unlike any one hour of real life that the world ever saw, how vain and paltry are the efforts of those who try to put real life on the stage as it actually is; how vain and paltry are all criticisms that judge a play because of its likeness or unlikeness to actual life in small particulars.

I do not forget that a great gulf is fixed between the classic masterpieces of the world, "Edipus," "Hamlet," "Phedre," "Tartuffe," and our modern drama of everyday life. Their methods, their style, their conventions, their treatment of the passions, the aspects of humanity that they try to seize and represent, are not the same as ours, who traffic in the drama of contemporary life. It would take me out of my way to examine and explain the difference between the different schools. But widely different as they are in many things, they are all alike in some respects. The classic drama and the drama of modern life both try to seize and present what is interesting in real life; they both represent certain actualities of life in exact imitation of real life; and they both try to create and preserve a continuous *illusion* of real life; though the illusion of the poetic and classic drama is not the illusion of the modern

drawing-room play. But it is always an *illusion* of real life. It breaks down the moment you bring it to the test of real life. If you look carefully into it, you will find that the modern drawing-room play which seems so much like real life is indeed in many respects as far away from real life as the most stilted tragedy. And all attempts to put upon the stage a veritable slice of real life are generally as dull as real life; they only succeed in portraying the inorganic, disconnected, uninteresting series of humdrum occurrences that is constantly passing before our eyes. In the drama, as in the other arts, art is art because it is *not* Nature; because it is something quite distinct from Nature; because it is *récherché*, organic, architectural, magic, disdainful of commonplace; because it selects from the mass of real life this one thing, this one feature, this one character, this one moment, takes it right away from real life and the real world, and puts it in fresh combinations, into a world of its own. And in the drama, as in the other arts, the more rare and beautiful the things that the artist has gathered for you, the more they are fired and coloured in the furnace of his imagination, the less the result will be like real life. And in the end you will find that this paradox of mine always holds true. The more the dramatist has crammed his play with the higher and greater verities of life and character, the less time and space he will have for the ordinary, everyday, obvious inessential things; and therefore the less his play will be like real life as it actually passes before your eyes. But because this is so, because the dramatist cannot give you all that Nature gives, is no reason that he should be false and careless in what he does give you. It should all be taken from real life, faithfully and fearlessly seen, faithfully and fearlessly studied, faithfully and fearlessly transported into that other world.

I glanced a little while back at the great difficulties that beset the dramatist in comparison with the

novelist, because of the limitations and conventions in time and space which the dramatist must submit to. In another regard he is at great disadvantage compared with the novelist. The novelist has not only unlimited space and time, but he has also the immense aid of description. The novelist stands on his stage beside his characters and describes them; analyzes their motives; explains what they are feeling; tells you their past history at any length, hints and prophesies all that is going to happen to them. Again, the novelist tells his story directly by his own word of mouth, and when he writes dialogue it is the direct and simple utterance of the speaker. Every sentence the dramatist writes has to illustrate the character of the speaker, and has also to carry on the story, not directly, but indirectly and by implication. How very unlike real life this is! When in real life do you hear people talking in such a way as to unfold the dearest secret of their hearts; betraying their thoughts and all the springs of their actions; and in the same sentence carrying on a definite, connected, involved, organic history?

But if the dramatist has to contend with these enormous difficulties that the novelist knows nothing about; if he is placed at the start in a position where it is impossible for him to portray real life with the simple freedom and easy directness of the novelist, consider for a moment what immense difficulties beset both novelist and dramatist, compared with the painter, in any attempt to represent real life.

The painter has but one moment, one scene, to portray. Let him choose that well, and he can give you an exact picture of that moment, of all that is happening in that scene, and all that it contains. The dramatist, the novelist, the poet, have to portray an (endless) succession of moments, an endless succession of scenes, all of them definitely and organically connected. Every moment of a play something is happening, every moment presents a new picture,

This difference between the arts of painting and literature has been very finely indicated by Matthew Arnold in his "Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön." I will leave you to read and digest the poem for yourselves, merely snatching a verse or two from it to illustrate my meaning.

The poet is walking in Hyde Park with a friend, and a beautiful London scene is spread out before them on a May morning :

"Behold," I said, "the painter's sphere !
 The limits of his art appear !
 The passing group, the summer morn,
 The grass, the elms, that blossom'd thorn ;
 Those cattle couched, or as they rise,
 Their shining flanks, their liquid eyes ;
 These or much greater things, but caught,
 Like these, and in *one* aspect brought
 In outward semblance he must give
 A *moment's* life to things that live."

Passing on, different sounds catch the ear; the breeze rustling from the trees, the splashing of the waves under the bridge, and the organ sounding in Westminster Abbey.

"The world of music !" I exclaimed,
 * * * * * "What a sphere
 Large and profound hath genius here,
 Th' inspired musician what a range,
 What power of passion, wealth of change !
 Some pulse of feeling he must choose
 And its locked fount of beauty use,
 And through the stream of music tell
 Its else unutterable spell."

The friends pass on, and

"reach the Ride
 Where gaily flows the human tide.
 Afar in rest the cattle lay,
 We heard afar faint music play ;
 But agitated, brisk, and near,
 Men with their stream of life were here.
 The young, the happy, and the fair,
 The old, the sad, the worn were there.

Some vacant, and some musing went,
 And some in talk and merriment.
 Nods, smiles, and greetings, and farewells,
 And now and then, perhaps, their swells
 A sigh, a tear—but in the throng
 All changes fast, and hies along.
 'Behold at last the poet's sphere!
 But who,' I said, 'suffices here?
 For, ah! so much he has to do!
 Be painter and musician too!
 The aspect of the moment show,
 The feeling of the moment know!
 . . . Then comes his sorest spell
 Of toil! he must life's *movement* tell!
 The thread which binds it all in one,
 And not its separate parts alone!
 His eye must travel down, at full,
 The long, unpausing spectacle,
 With faithful unrelaxing force
 Attend it from its primal source;
 From change to change and year to year
 Attend it of its mid career,
 Attend it to the last repose
 And solemn silence of its close.
 Yes, all this eddying, motley throng
 That sparkles in the sun along,
 Girl, statesman, merchant, soldier bold,
 Master and servant, young and old,
 Grave, gay, child, parent, husband, wife,
 He follows home and lives their life.'

I think these passages will serve to show how infinitely difficult are the arts of the poet, the novelist, and the dramatist, compared with the art of the painter, in that they have to render a connected succession of scenes, and not one scene. I think they show how prolonged and sustained and complex is the effort of the poet or dramatist compared with the effort of the painter; and why it is that mankind has placed in the highest seats of reverence and honour, not great painters, not great sculptors, not great musicians, but great poets, Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton. And they also show why painters can render with the utmost exactitude certain moments and certain aspects of

human life that must either be omitted or falsified by the dramatist. And when the dramatist does it, when he does exactly render certain moments and certain aspects of humanity, he generally throws that part of his work out of relation and proportion to all the rest of his scheme, and is apt to give an impression of patchwork and incongruity.

Now I hope I have shown you why it is impossible for the dramatist to be like real life; and why, if you carefully follow his work and check it off bit by bit and moment by moment, you will find it is something quite unlike real life. He should of course give you an illusion of real life, and the art of creating this illusion is the art of the dramatist. Unless you can grant to him a provisional belief in the reality of his scenes you will not follow him with pleasure. He should always deceive you into taking it for real life. He should make you lend yourselves to him for the moment. But believe me it is all make-believe. And the permanent value, not the monetary success, not the long run—the permanent value of his work will depend upon how many of the great verities of life and character he has managed to cram into his play.

But against all plays that were ever written you will find somebody or the other bringing this charge—"This is not real life." Read the criticisms that appear on any new play, listen to the talk of folks coming out of the theatre, and you will generally find somebody saying, "This is not real life." I happened to take up two daily papers and read the criticisms on a play that had been produced the evening before. One of them said: "These are real men and women; these are the people whom we are meeting every day." The other paper said: "These are not real people at all; these are creatures of fantasy, creatures of the playwright's brain; they do not exist at all."

How do you account for this diametrical opposition of judgment between two trained critics? Can it be

that one of them was wrong? I wouldn't dare to hint it. No, when a playwright finds, as he generally does, that two different critics, both of whose opinions are of equal value, are saying totally diverse and contradictory things about his play, it is not his business to suggest that one or both of them may be wrong. It then becomes the playwright's duty to find some means of reconciling the contradictory opinions, and proving that both of them are right. And when one spectator affirms of a play "This is real life," and another spectator affirms "This is not real life," the reply is "Of course it isn't real life—it is very obviously and intentionally a play. That goes without saying. Here is the point—What aspects of real life and character did the dramatist set himself to portray? If he has seized and portrayed them faithfully, he must necessarily be false to real life in many other respects. What aspects of real life and character are you searching for in his play? If you are searching for the same aspects of life and character that the dramatist has rendered, then you will find his play to be true to life. If you are searching for other aspects of life and character, then you will find his play to be false to life."

What aspects of life and character do you search for when you go to a play? My country friend was distressed because the stage meal was not a real one. To him the play had failed because it was evidently wrong in the matter of eating and drinking, of which he was a judge. It had really failed in the higher matters of character and literature, of which he was not a judge. But this had not distressed him. It is, of course, quite plain that we can only judge a play according to our own mental aptitudes and training. But all judgments that are based on a supposed likeness or unlikeness to real life are useless or fallacious, until it is first settled what aspect of real life the dramatist was trying to paint, and what aspect of real life the spectator is looking for.

Now, so-called realism or naturalism has made great advances in the novel, but it has been to a great extent repulsed on the stage. It has been successful only in quite small theatres, and has been supported by cliques rather than by the great playgoing public, who have been repelled by it and driven to musical comedy. One reason for this rejection of realism by the average playgoer, may be found in the great difference of its method of presentation in the novel and on the boards. The novel is read at home, in your own sitting-room, in your own drawing-room. When I read a naturalistic novel, treating, say, of the slums of the East-end, I do not read it in the slums. There may be good reasons why I should visit the slums, but when I read a novel of slum life, my setting, my *mise-en-scène*, my surroundings, are my own comfortable study or drawing-room. But when I go to a play of slum life, to the extent that the play is faithfully realistic, to the extent that it does what the naturalistic dramatist demands, to that extent I am actually in the slums. They are actually before my eyes in all their bare, sordid reality, without any comment or description. In the realistic novel, it is chiefly the novelist's power of description that arrests me; his style, his observation, his colouring, and, above all, his imagination. If the novelist hasn't style, insight, imagination, if he merely comes into the slums, sees a number of dirty and repulsive objects and catalogues them—then he is as dull and uninteresting as the realistic playwright generally contrives to be.

I will give you an instance of the difference between placing on the stage a certain scene of low life, and putting it into the pages of a novel. Some of you have read Dickens's "Little Dorrit." He describes a scene in the Borough near to the old Marshalsea prison. It is the backs of a row of dirty tumble-down houses, with the washing of the inhabitants stretched out to dry in the backyards on sagging clothes-lines. Put that realistically on the stage, and you could scarcely have

a more uninteresting, or dirty, or sordid scene. But turn to Dickens's description, and see what his magic imagination finds there. One of his bright live touches says that the scene looked as if the inhabitants of the street had been fishing out of their back windows for flannel petticoats—and hadn't caught much!

There is everything in real life. But it is not what Nature has put there; it is what the observation of the artist has seen there; and above all, how he has transfigured it for you in his imagination. All the great characters in fiction and the drama are taken from real life. They are first seen there, observed there, carefully and faithfully and minutely studied there, and then they are taken right away from the real world and put into the world of imagination, and transfigured into something rich and strange and new, something quite unlike real life. I'll give you one more instance of this transforming power, and then I have done.

In George Eliot's "Felix Holt" there is a very beautiful and very faithful portrait of a dissenting minister, the Reverend Rufus Lyon. It is perfectly done, and I will answer for its correctness and authenticity. In "Pickwick" there is a dissenting minister called Stiggins, and in "Bleak House" there is a dissenting minister called Chadband. They are outrageous, monstrous, colossal creatures of the imagination. But the instincts of the English and American nations have seized upon Stiggins and Chadband, and have made them household words wherever the English language is spoken. Rufus Lyon has a goodly number of admirers; but he is comparatively little known to the great English public, and has never appealed to them as Stiggins and Chadband have done. Why? Is the public instinct wrong? I do not think so. I believe that, though Stiggins and Chadband are far more unlike real life than Rufus Lyon; are, indeed, in many ways extravagant caricatures, they are yet imaginatively more true than Rufus Lyon. They show not

a realistic individual portrait, but the essence and tendency of dissent, its form and body; show its leading characteristics in full and unchecked sway, disclose its ignoble possibilities, foreshadow its ignoble end, in a powerful and truthful way that George Eliot's more exact and realistic creation does not suggest. The sterling and lovable qualities of Rufus Lyon; his integrity, his learning, his piety, his beautiful homely nature were indeed to be found amongst dissenters of his day, and are still to be found. But most of the traits that distinguish Rufus Lyon are traits of our general English character at its best; inheritances and possessions which came to him, not as a dissenter, but from our common national past; and from the Anglican Church whence English dissent split off. The chief and distinguishing traits of Stiggins and Chadband, though outrageously overdrawn and accentuated, are yet the distinctive and special marks of English dissent; they are never found outside English dissenting life, and the American sects which have descended from it; they are what specialize English dissent and make it a distinct variety, a distinct species for the sociologist. And though Stiggins and Chadband are not nearly as true to real life as Rufus Lyon; though they are quite one-sided and overdrawn, they are yet imaginatively more true; and the public instinct is a right one, which has seized on them, and has made them types and symbols of English dissent throughout the English race.

X

STANDARDIZING THE DRAMA

A lecture delivered to the O.P. Club on Sunday evening, February 6th, 1910. Chairman, Mr. Norman McKinnell.

IT is many years since I have spoken to a gathering of playgoers. And to-night I have only to affirm and enlarge the two or three great simple rules which for many years I have been asking English playgoers to accept as the only basis of any school of English drama worthy of being called national, worthy of being regarded with pride, worthy of even being talked about.

I am afraid you are beginning to eye me as you do some impertinent stranger, in badly fitting black cloth and black gloves, who on a fine Sunday evening arrests you with an oily smirk, thrusts a tract into your hand, and demands in a painfully earnest voice, "Are you saved?" Pray try to regard me otherwise. Let me rather liken myself to an old and grateful and faithful servant of English playgoers—say a butler who takes a real interest that the family he serves shall live delicately, in well-built and well-appointed rooms, with fine damask linen, and the choicest dishes and wines.

About twenty-seven years ago I helped my friends, Mr. Carl Hentschel and Mr. Heneage Mandell, to found the original Playgoers' Club. At that time the active body of first-nighters in the pit and gallery were generally regarded as turbulent, pestilent fellows whom it was dangerous to encourage, and whom it was wise and dignified to ignore. I did not take that view. I felt that if we were to have an English drama, it would

be well there should be a good understanding between those who wrote and acted it, and those who paid to support it. An understanding of some kind always comes about in the long run by the simple process of playgoers staying away from the plays that they don't like. But this process does not tend to a good understanding between playgoers and playwrights. It tends to a bad understanding; for the playgoer is disappointed in not getting what instantly amuses him; and the playwright is disappointed, because he often finds that his best and most thoughtful work does not instantly win recognition; does not command sufficient support to be kept on the boards. Above all, the absence of any direct means of communication between playwright and playgoer tends to shut out all new and striking developments; to leave the possessor of new ideas and the sayer of new things to the chance of failure, because his play is regarded from a different standpoint from that he intended; or is condemned on a wrong issue; or is passed over because it has not struck the right section of playgoers.

For these, and for many other reasons; for the encouragement of a general interest in the drama; for the discussion of all questions relating to it, I am heartily in accord with the motive that founded and continues such clubs as the O.P. Club.

But it is superfluous to declare this now that the Club is an assured and growing success. I venture to congratulate Mr. Carl Hentschel and myself that we declared it so long ago as 1884, when such a declaration brought only ridicule and abuse. And we backed our opinion with sufficient solid support to establish the parent club to this, the original Playgoers' Club.

May I then set at the head of this lecture the same words that I set at the head of the first lecture I gave to playgoers in October, 1884? In trying to foreshadow and sketch the aims and destiny of the Playgoers' Club, I said:

“To be a member of this Club implies a devotion to the interests of the Drama for its own sake, not as an idle amusement for a vacant hour, but as the serious and fine art which has for its end the portrayal of all the varying passions of the human heart, and all the chances and changes of our mortal life.”

I fear I cannot claim that those words quite correctly gauge the tastes and aims of the great body of English Playgoers, or of such of them as form the great majority of this Club; or that I then gave a lead which the discussions and debates and main drift of the Playgoers' Club and the O.P. Club have since followed and exemplified. Rather I seem in some quarters to have given ground for offence; and in other quarters for constant and reiterated misunderstanding and misstatements of my views and convictions. But if I did not then interpret and set forth the tastes and aims of the great majority of playgoers, did I interpret and set forth the tastes and aims of the active vanguard of them?

I will suppose our question and theme to-night to be these—“What kind of English drama do we wish mainly and predominantly to establish, and by our presence and influence to aid in establishing all over the Empire? In what way do we wish the main body of our fellow-citizens to spend the three or four hours of evening leisure which for the many millions of them, busy in stifling deadening industrialism, is all that they can count their life on week-days? What kind of product would we like to see holding our theatres, amusing and stimulating our vast populations, influencing their tastes, chastening their manners, enlarging their ideas, bringing colour and beauty into their drab existence, broadening their outlook upon life, sometimes perhaps insensibly guiding and shaping their conduct? What kind of drama, or rather what kinds of drama, would we at the end of our career as playgoers wish to point to and say, “I helped this on; I applauded that when others were hooting it; I stuck up for such a kind of play,

argued for it, defended it, because that is the sort of drama which I thought worthy to occupy the leisure and interest of the citizens of a great Empire, likely to quicken their emotional, intellectual, or spiritual life, that is, to give them more life"?

What is the sort of drama that as citizens we wish to see prevail, and become truly popular and operative, and to win a place of honour in public esteem, and to be called the English Drama? Whatever his own private practice may be, I do not think I should rightly interpret the tastes and aspirations of any one here if I said, "We want legs and tomfoolery to prevail; we admire them; we understand them; we enjoy them, and there's an end of the whole matter." Very well. There is an end of the whole matter, if that sums up your views and aspirations. If that is the final decision of the great body of English playgoers, it is obviously useless to debate. There is nothing to debate about.

But I dare say many of you would reply, "Well, at any rate, legs and tomfoolery don't bore us, and when we go to a theatre we are not going to pay to be bored." There I am wholly with you. If there is one man who commands my most cordial sympathy, who is my sworn brother, it is the man who declines to pay his sixpence or his half-guinea to be bored. There is a good deal to be said for legs and tomfoolery as specifics against boredom. I'm going to say something in their favour in a few minutes. I have for the moment placed them in direct antithesis to drama, because in our present conditions they are the greatest enemy to drama; and because just now they constitute the great staple, the enormous bulk of the entertainment that is being nightly offered in the thousands of theatres and music-halls of the British Empire.

Now I am going to make one or two handsome admissions to the advocates for "legs and tomfoolery" and amusement at any price. I have placed "legs and tomfoolery" in direct contrast to drama. If any one of

you happen to remember any utterances of mine on the Drama, you will most surely call to mind my often repeated entreaty to English playgoers:—"Separate your Drama from your popular amusement."

If I do not meet with too much opposition I shall by and by submit that appeal to you to-night. Meantime I will own to you that the drama and popular amusement never can be separated. And I will give you the reason.

The drama is not like any other art. A picture is painted for a single spectator; or at most for no more than the group of three or four spectators who can comfortably stand in front of it. A book is written for a single reader at a time; or at most for the three or four who can hear it read aloud. The picture and book are judged in cold blood. Not so the play. Any popular play in its every representation appeals to a more or less excited mob; all of different ages, with more or less different moods, different tempers, different tastes, different ideals, different opinions, different states of digestion, different emotions, different degrees of education. Now most plays try to meet an audience on some common level ground where there can be some sort of temporary agreement and unity. So far as the Drama is concerned, there is much to be said for Tolstoi's contention that Art is something which instantly appeals to, instantly pleases, the simplest people. Some such unity of appeal is present in every dramatist's mind when he writes his play. I confess to a hearty dislike for all hole and corner drama, for all plays that mainly appeal to cliques, or coteries, or whims. Especially objectionable to me is the play that appeals merely to superior persons.

Very good plays can be written for a class, or even for a specific moral purpose. But then they have to be good plays first, and you soon forget all about the class they are meant to touch, and most likely all about the moral purpose they are meant to enforce. Shelley

wrote poetry to prove that it is wrong to eat mutton chops. But then it was *good* poetry, and his vegetarianism didn't matter. Dickens wrote a story to show that it was wrong to ill-treat workhouse children. But then it was a *good* story; and we cherish it and admire it still; not because it protects workhouse children, but because it contains the characters of Bumble, and Fagan, the Artful Dodger, and Bill Sykes and Nancy. It is the artist who has survived; not the moralist, not the reformer. Good plays then can be written for a specific moral purpose, or for a class purpose, provided that unconsciously, the artist, or the wit, or the storyteller swamps the moralist, and his moral purpose, and makes him of no account.

This is rather a long digression, but I wanted to establish the pretty evident fact that plays to be successful must have an almost universal appeal, or an appeal to a very large class. This is why many really good plays fail. They are produced at a theatre where their particular appeal does not find a sufficiently numerous audience whose general tastes and sympathies are awakened in response. But any socialistic play will find a rapturous reception at the hands of a purely socialist audience. And any suffragette play will be hailed as a masterpiece by any audience composed of suffragettes. And constantly the most witless farrago of legs and tomfoolery meets with an enormous success, because all of us more or less like legs and tomfoolery.

Still, very few plays hit all audiences, or all moods, or all tastes of any audience. And the playwright not only consciously or unconsciously tries to please his audience on the common level ground of their universal emotions, or their love of fun, or their love of horror—he also tries in different parts of his play to meet and satisfy playgoers of different tastes, and different humours, and different views of life. He shapes his play so that each playgoer may be interested or

amused at some time, and by some scene of the performance. This aim sometimes mars the unity and perfection of his work. But the governing fact remains that all members of the audience have to be kept so far as possible interested throughout the entire play. Now some of the members of every audience at every ordinary performance have come with the object of having some fun out of it. And some of these, perhaps most of them, are almost sure to have very elementary notions of what constitutes fun, and wit, and humour. But the playwright has got to interest them all, or be damned. This state of things is a universal condition of play production.

Very few plays are permanently popular that do not recognize and provide for this necessarily composite character of every audience. It was a marked feature of Elizabethan audiences—audiences that welcomed and applauded plays on the very highest levels of poetry and imagination. But there were groundlings then; groundlings in intellect as well as groundlings in location of places. There are many groundlings in intellect among our fashionable audiences of to-day. But they pay their half-guineas. In London to-day not a single actor, or author, or manager can touch sixpence; not a crust of bread or a pint of beer can be earned for a stage carpenter until about a thousand pounds a week has been first taken for necessary expenses. Under this very hard condition is every play produced; and the best play that brings in fifty pounds a week less than expenses has soon to be taken off. How many fine books or fine pictures would survive such a killing test? Is it a wonder that the general level of serious play production is so low? And that legs and tomfoolery are triumphant because of their universal appeal?

Well, I have briefly sketched the governing main condition of playwriting; this necessity of an appeal on the part of the playwright to such tastes and emotions

and moods as are likely to be found in every member of every audience ; and also the kindred necessity of an appeal to all the varying humours and tastes of humanity ; including the highest and the lowest, on the chance of hitting everybody in the audience at some time during the performance ; either by the sword of pathos, or the arrow of wit, or merely by the bludgeon of low, coarse, ribald humour. And this latter weapon is the easiest to employ, and the safest to get immediately home. You may be sliced by a sword, or pierced by an arrow, or winged by a bullet, and never feel it or know anything about it at the time. But when somebody bangs you with a bludgeon you know at once that you are hit.

For these reasons then, it is impossible to separate our drama and our popular amusement on the actual stage ; they will always be inextricably mixed and muddled in varying proportions. Goethe, as Professor Brander Matthews reminds us, has graphically symbolized this intimate and inseparable nature of the drama and popular amusement in the two prologues to *Faust*.

You will remember that in the first prologue the clown has some very wise things to say. The poet has been loftily abusing the motley multitude and the noisy crowd who form the bulk of every audience, and has been appealing to the verdict of posterity. But the clown replies to the poet :

“This cant about posterity I hate ;
 About posterity were I to prate
 Who then the living would amuse ? For they
 Will have diversion, ay, and 'tis their due.
 To work then ! Prove a master in your art.
 Let phantasy with all her choral train,
 Sense, reason, feeling, passion, bear their part.
 But mark ! Let folly also mingle in the strain !
 Your finished gentleman you ne'er can please ;
 A growing mind alone will grateful prove.”

In the first prologue the scene is laid in the wings of the theatre ; and the characters are the manager,

the poet, and the clown. In the second prologue the scene is laid in Heaven; and the characters are the Lord God, the Angels, the Archangels, and Mephistopheles.

What, the Eternal Father and the seraphic host, and Punch and Judy? Even so, these two groups of personages; and all the angels and devils, and all the many millions of men and women that lie between them, down to the woodenest figure that jerks in the woodenest farce, or squeaks at the street corner! These are our dramatis personae. The Heavenly Mansions, and a puppet box in the meanest alley? Even so, and all the waving landscapes and seascapes, and all imaginable streets and lanes, and by-paths and palaces, and cottages, and dens, and attics that lie between them. These are our scenery. The drama like a benevolent octopus throws out its all-embracing tentacles and draws everything in for its nourishment and delight. The drama has many disadvantages compared with the other fine arts, but it has the supreme advantage of universality of appeal. It is commensurate with the whole of humanity. Poetry and painting and literature are constantly showing tendencies to become precious, superior, affected, incomprehensible; to lose themselves up little by-lanes; to get away from the main roads of sanity and universality. Of course, the great public at last pulls them up and brings them back. The drama too at times shows the same tendencies to become narrow, cliquish, affected, freakish; to lose touch with actuality, with the plain verities of life. But how soon the playwright gets cuffed back to general sanity, and the discipline of common-sense.

I have dwelt upon this point, because I wish to explain how cordially and frankly I accept and welcome the doctrine of the catholicity and universality of the drama; how eager I am that it should include all classes and forms, even the most hybrid, that delight and amuse the people. I suppose it is useless for me to

affirm, as I have done hundreds of times before, that I have never said a single word against popular amusement in itself. I simply repeat that statement. I have always said that popular amusement is both good and necessary. And I would not proclaim myself so hopelessly removed and cut off from ordinary humanity as not to own to my love for "legs and tomfoolery." By all means let us have "legs and tomfoolery." They are excellent things—especially when the dancing is the dancing of Pavlova or of Genée, and when the tomfoolery is the wise, grateful, refreshing, lifegiving tomfoolery of Rabelais.

I think I have amply defined my attitude towards the various species of drama and popular amusement. I hope I have shown that I am not sour, or narrow, or bitten by the maggot of making the drama a sort of Sunday School for grown-up people.

Now I am going to ask you to look at the other side of the question. We have seen that on the stage—the modern stage, at least—the drama and popular amusement will always be mixed and blended in various shades and proportions. This has always been the case; except in Greek tragedy, where the drama was in some sense a religious ceremony. Of course the Greek religion was wholly different from what is generally meant by religion in modern Western civilization. Moreover, Aeschylus and Sophocles had to unbend and provide a Satyric play alongside their tragedies. There is no reason in the nature of things why the drama should not again become something of a religious ceremony. I do not wish to make it so myself; nor is it likely to take that form in our day and generation. Meantime we cheerfully accept the fact that the drama is always likely to be more or less connected with popular amusement on our stage. But the very fact that we speak of them under different names shows that they are essentially different things; that by their nature they are quite distinct. Do you wish me to prove this?

Some time ago I went into a theatre and saw a popular comedian in one of his leading scenes. He was uproariously received on his entrance, and when he shouted some opening catchwords of sheer nonsense, they were received with frantic delight by the audience. Owing to my defective education I could not attach any meaning to his phrase; it consisted of six English words all of them well known to me, but they did not form any sense. They were not a sarcastic reply to any obviously foolish sentiment or proposition. As, for instance, if somebody had remarked "Popular education has produced a remarkably wise generation of Englishmen," and the comedian had replied "Tiddy fol lol," or "Ta! Ra! Ra! Bosh! De! Ay!" His catchwords had no meaning whatever; yet he kept on repeating them; and each time he repeated them he received louder applause. And this applause came as much from the stalls as from the cheaper parts of the house. If you took the words you could not have supposed beforehand that they would cause amusement, but rather the cold blank wonder with which you regard a fool. Yet I am convinced that the audience was amused, because they kept on laughing and applauding. As the scene went on he varied his sentence with one or two others of the same kind. His verbal display however, enthusiastically as it was received, did not receive as much recognition as his business with an accordion. He did not play any tune on the accordion; he kept on sounding single notes and playing funny tricks with the stops, and using it for every possible purpose except that of producing music. This went on for about ten minutes, and at the end he received a tremendous ovation. I suppose his salary was about equal to that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hope you will not unkindly suggest that he was more wisely and usefully employed than our present Chancellor.

A short time after I watched an audience at a performance of *The School for Scandal*. Here, again, the

amusement was genuine; but it was altogether less boisterous, less hearty, less spontaneous and irresistible than the amusement which the popular comedian caused. And the loudest laughter was not caused by Sheridan's wittiest lines, but by some rather foolish modern gags and business of the actors. Still Sheridan's wit and his comedy of character did meet with recognition and appreciation.

Again, a third time, I watched a play of Ibsen's. Here, with a comparatively small audience, there was curious breathless interest and intense enjoyment and amusement. You must allow me to call it amusement, using the word amusement in its wider and derivative meaning. In this sense, and it is the only sense in which it can be used in speaking of the drama generally, we may say that any play or entertainment which does not bore an audience, amuses them. I am not here holding a brief for modern realistic drama. No kind of theatrical entertainment seems to me so worthy of being avoided as a realistic play that merely paints some dull corner of modern life just as it is, without humour, without imagination, without philosophy, without passion. These are the things that redeem and justify realism in the drama and in every art.

To return to our three audiences. They were all intensely amused and interested at the theatre by wholly different means and to wholly different ends. For you will not tell me that the amusement derived from the tomfoolery of watching the comedian play funny tricks with an accordion is at all of the same kind as the amusement to be obtained from hearing Sheridan's witty lines; and in noticing his broad delineation of artificial human character. Still less is it like the intense pleasure of watching a play where the dramatist is too much absorbed in his great business of showing you a deeply conceived study of human life and character, to tickle you with wit or epigram or funny business.

I say that while all these audiences got pleasure

from their visit to the theatre, their pleasure was of a wholly different kind ; it was stirred by different means ; it came from a different source. In the case of Sheridan's comedy, however, the pleasures of drama and of mere amusement were mixed. In the others, the two pleasures were as widely different as the pleasure of taking a glass of whiskey and a cigar is from the pleasure of seeing a landscape by Turner. These may both be genuine pleasures, both even desirable pleasures, but they are wholly different in their nature. And I affirm that the two pleasures I have described are not only different in their nature, but that the one is the true pleasure to be derived from Drama ; and the other is the pleasure of cheap empty amusement not quite so high intellectually as a game at bowls or skittles. And the pleasure from the Drama is not only higher in its nature, but is greater in its degree, and is the only one that is worthy of being treasured and remembered.

But you say what is the good of telling us this ? We know and recognize the difference in these two pleasures. I have no doubt that many members of the O. P. Club are as well versed in this matter as I am, and are as eager as myself to have a school of drama that shall give us the true pleasure of the drama, that of seeing life represented and interpreted on the stage.

But is there any such discrimination amongst the great body of English playgoers ? I constantly listen to conversations about the theatre by strangers in railway trains, in hotels, in the theatre itself. And though there is sometimes real criticism and real discernment, in the majority of cases I find that the theatre is generally regarded by playgoers as a funny place where funny people do funny things, and the play is generally judged upon that level. It follows that if by chance the average playgoer goes to a theatre where the dramatist and actors are trying to give him the true pleasure of drama, he is merely bored, because he is looking for a comedian who salutes him with a

senseless catchword, and plays all sorts of tricks with an accordion, except getting music out of it. So do other authors and actors play all sorts of tricks with human nature except getting its right music out of it. And while this immense majority of audiences come to the theatre in this temper and with these tastes, we can have no worthy national drama. The first step is to get some considerable body of them to discriminate between the two kinds of pleasure; to show them that the drama can give them a higher and more lasting pleasure; to persuade them to choose this higher pleasure because it is greater in degree, as well as higher in kind.

Thus we have seen that though the drama and popular amusement can never be wholly separated on the stage, yet our only hope of founding a school of national drama lies in separating them in our minds and judgments; and in getting a larger and larger number of playgoers to make this distinction, and to demand this higher pleasure in the theatre. For I hope I am speaking the wishes of at least the majority of my fellow members of the O. P. Club in saying that we, as playgoers, do desire to see the English drama taking a leading place as a fine art, and an instrument of civilization throughout the length and breadth of our Empire. I cannot imagine any other reason for the existence of a Playgoers' Club. I cannot imagine any other intelligible or worthy aim or purpose in our meeting for debate, and discussion, and comparison of opinions.

If you will allow me, then, I will assume that to be our purpose and aim, or the aim of some of us. How shall we set about it? What kind of drama do we picture to ourselves as worthy of encouragement and development?

I wish you to notice a very remarkable fact. It is this; that hitherto in any great outburst of a national art—architecture, painting, music, poetry, drama, sculpture, there has always been a certain homogeneity, a

certain definite form and mould which has inspired, and shaped, and governed all the specimens of it. Take our Gothic architecture. In each of its styles, Norman, Early English, Decorated, Perpendicular, there was one rigid dominant set of rules, a type which prescribed and circumscribed the general character and design of every building that was erected throughout the country during the reign of that style. Within this rigid conformity there was wild and infinite variety—in the Early English style, for instance, there were such different buildings as Wells and Salisbury, with a wealth of differing detail in each. There was plenty of room for individual imagination, invention, and even caprice and fun in the subordinate features; but the main designs of all the buildings conformed to a great type, a great style, a great single impulse, a great single idea, which bound and united every architect and every workman in the country. All the energy of imagination of all the builders seemed to flow in one main channel, and leave no surplus for a rival style, a rival type of design.

Take, again, our Elizabethan drama. Again you will find infinite variety in the schemes of action; in the music of the verse; in the characters of the plays; in their humour; in their way of looking at life; in the places and times of their action. But all this variety of individual impulse was subject to conformity with one great general type. I think you will find it the same with any great art outburst that you come to examine. There are many reasons why such a unity and homogeneity of character and design and purpose seem unlikely to arise in any art to-day. Perhaps if any specimens of our modern English drama survive to delight future generations, they may on examination be found unconsciously to conform to some such general type and character. It is, however, far more likely that future generations will not take the trouble to examine them. Still we must do our work sincerely as if we

meant it to survive—at least to be ready to meet future examination of our aims and purposes.

But at present we seem to have no settled type, no settled style. That seems to be inevitable in our confused civilization. We have many types and many forms and many styles, and most of them seem to be lifeless imitations ; lifeless copies of the Elizabethan drama ; of the romantic cape and sword drama ; of the French modern drama ; of the Norwegian drama. While the one thing that we English do supremely well because we do it spontaneously, is the curious entertainment which I have described as “legs and tomfoolery.”

William Morris used to say that the only style of really living English architecture is the style of the modern corner public-house. That is what we build naturally, easily, spontaneously, with unconscious inspiration. Other and finer buildings do indeed arise in our midst ; but for the most part they are comparatively dead, mere copies of other and remote styles of building. But a suburban villa or a corner public-house we build easily and spontaneously, as a symbol and expression of our architectural needs and desires. It is something the same with the drama. While we seem to write comedy and drama laboriously ; with difficulty ; and for the most part in a dull, uninspired way, our real spontaneous national delight, seems to be in those pieces which with your permission I have called “legs and tomfoolery.” Well, it is useless to build Gothic Cathedrals for a population whose architectural demand is for suburban villas and corner public-houses. But I humbly submit that a nation whose spontaneous impulse and natural standard in building declares itself chiefly in suburban villas and corner public-houses, cannot be said to have much care or love for architecture, or any knowledge of it. And I very humbly submit to you that a nation whose spontaneous impulse and natural standard in drama manifests itself in “legs and tomfoolery,” and in little pieces of

harmless sentimentality, cannot be said to have any high regard for its drama; any real care or love for it; any knowledge of what a fine art it is, and what a great power and influence it might become.

But here you will say, "Cannot we have all these kinds of entertainments, all these kinds of drama, comedy, tragedy, fantasy, pantomime, burlesque, tomfoolery? Cannot they all flourish in our midst? Will that not be the best general condition of the drama when they are all welcomed and supported?"

Our present civilization is widely different from anything the world has ever known; more varied; more cosmopolitan; more shifting; more subversive of settled views and schools of art. In such a civilization will not the drama, and indeed all the arts, be necessarily an aimless olla podrida? Perhaps that may be so, but it is not a comforting prospect to the artist. We have seen that the drama must necessarily be popular in a sense that no other art need be. To some extent it is undoubtedly a question of what proportion mere tomfoolery shall bear to serious comedy and drama. With Falstaff we may all like "your good sherries sack" and believe in its cheering qualities; but when it comes, as it did in Falstaff's tavern bill, to a ha'porth of bread and half a crown's worth of sack, we may be quite sure that our tastes are vitiated and our digestion impaired.

But you may say, are the proportions so alarming? Well, look not merely at London, but at the drama throughout the Empire? Take a list of the entertainments that will be played in the theatres and Music Halls of the United Kingdom to-morrow night. In London itself in the height of the theatrical season there is not a single performance of Shakespeare. Throughout the whole of the United Kingdom to-morrow night there are only four performances of Shakespeare; at Manchester, Dublin, Dewsbury, and Llanelly respectively.

Do you call that a satisfactory state of things? Take

the entertainments outside Shakespeare. Many of the programmes are very varied and mixed. But if you could really estimate the amounts paid to witness true drama, and the amount paid to witness "legs and tomfoolery," I do not think you would find the proportions far different from those of the bread and the sack in Falstaff's tavern bill. In the provinces the drama may almost be said to be extinct, except for the rare visits of a London Manager. Cultivated people in the provinces have ceased to trouble about their local drama; they do not go to the local theatre except when they take their children to the Pantomime. The really living entertainment in the provinces is at the Music Halls; and it may be most cordially recognized that the Music Halls are gradually improving, and that they are gradually admitting more and more drama into their programmes. It is, then, partly a question what proportion true drama shall bear in the sum of the entertainment provided at theatres and music halls. If you as lovers and students of the drama think that proportion is satisfactory then you are content that whatever drama we have shall be a second-rate thing, quite inferior in influence and popularity to the emptiest and shallowest kind of entertainment. For my own part I am inclined to think that you cannot have two standards; that when there is any art energy in a country it generally goes into one distinct and commanding form and style.

It is not wholly, however, a question of proportion. It is partly a matter of habit. The latest researches seem to show that our tastes and characters are much more largely a matter of habit than physiologists and philosophers have hitherto supposed. We have certain tastes and habits in the theatre because other people have them, and because we have grown into them without thinking. It is declared that our average brains to-day have quite as much capacity, and as many convolutions in their cortex, as the average Greek

brains in the days of Plato and Sophocles. If you had been born in Athens about 500 B.C., and had been fed from your childhood on a diet of Æschylus and Sophocles, instead of questioning and disagreeing from my opinions to-night, as I daresay some of you are doing, you would be wondering how any sensible man could possibly take such an incredibly low and debased view of the functions of the drama as I do.

Indeed, it is nearly all a matter of habits and imitation. We are more imitative than monkeys. No playgoer could have laughed for fifteen minutes at a man who was shouting senseless perversions of his native English language, and playing all sorts of tricks with an accordion, if he had not been bred in that mental atmosphere; and if he had not been carefully schooled and disciplined to admire that kind of wit and humour by seeing it constantly praised in the newspapers. I believe that, without great difficulty, a very large body of English playgoers could easily be brought to take a real interest in true drama, to love it, and foster it; and to grow more and more accustomed to seek their pleasure at the theatre in a representation of life, rather than in perversions of words and in meaningless antics.

Indeed, with several recent examples of successful appeals on higher levels, we have good grounds for hoping that the English drama will take its rightful place in the national life whenever a large claim is made with the right material, and in a serious spirit. It is as I say, something of a matter of due proportion; more still a matter of getting playgoers into a habit of appreciating and demanding the best. If, indeed, there were not much ground for hope and encouragement, I would not have accepted Mr. Carl Hentschel's kind invitation to address you to-night. For it is useless to complain of a state of things that is irremediable. It is because I think our present condition is remediable; is capable of great and perhaps rapid improvement, that I have spoken in a strain which some of you may have

thought too severe and too pessimistic. If I have dwelt too much upon unsatisfactory signs and facts, it is because these are the only ones that it is profitable to review, to weigh, and, so far as it is possible, gradually to change. Perhaps the whole question has a greater national significance than is generally attributed to it. It is not a good symptom that so much of our leisure is spent in entertainments that at the best are harmless, and at the worst are hebetating, intellectually and spiritually degrading. I do not wish to moralize overmuch; still less do I wish to join those prophets of national disaster who, like Jonah, cry aloud, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed," and are then left in the lurch, because events fail to back them up.

But surely the question of how our populace spend their evenings is of the highest importance. If a time of national trial should overtake us, we would not wish to be found playing the fool in all our leisure time; we would wish rather to set our house in order ourselves, than that calamity, revolution, or war should set it in order for us; pointing grimly to our favourite evening pastime, and calling out to a chastened, perhaps a frenzied nation, "Take away that bauble!"

We will not end upon that note. If you will allow me, I will repeat the words I first spoke to our parent Club. Even if they do not sum up the total or main aims of this Club, they will yet sum up the idea of membership which some of us hold.

"To be a member of this Club implies a devotion to the interests of the drama for its own sake; not as an idle amusement for a vacant hour, but as the serious and fine art which has for its end the portrayal of all the varying passions of the human heart, and all the chances and changes of our mortal life."

XI

THE DELINEATION OF CHARACTER IN DRAMA

A lecture delivered to the Ethological Society on Wednesday,
May 4th, 1910. Chairman, Mr. A. B. Walkley.

I do not propose to offer to you to-night any solution of the many perpetual riddles of human character. I fear I shall rather complicate those riddles a little more; for I propose to ask you a few minor and attendant conundrums which present themselves to the modern dramatist. Especially do I seek to do my craft a good turn by impressing you with the enormous difficulties the dramatist has to contend with, when he tries to delineate human character on our modern stage.

If we ask the derivative meaning of the word "character," we find that it signifies some especial and individual mark; some hieroglyphic that Nature has stamped on a lump of human putty, to make it distinctive, individual, recognizable. This is the meaning we constantly assign to it in everyday intercourse, in dealing with historical personages, with personages in fiction, and with personages in drama. As Nature has given to us each an individual physiognomy, so we assume that she has given to each of us an individual character.

I suppose my fellow members of this Society—and especially those who have studied the structure and physiology of the brain, would agree with me when I say that our features, and their varying expressions, give a rough and mainly correct interpretation of the workings of the complicated and individual nervous

system that prompts them. We are all, more or less, connoisseurs of human character. We are dealing with it almost every hour of our life. Unconsciously, each of us must have absorbed an enormous amount of knowledge respecting it. Ordinary laymen judge character mainly from the features and their expression. The dramatist and the novelist also study character largely by these outer manifestations and signs; but I suppose an expert in the structure and physiology of the brain (such as our President) would always have present to him some vivid picture of the structure and condition of the nervous apparatus of any person with whom he was brought in contact. And I suppose that he, and the more learned members of this Society, would claim that this definite and complicated nervous apparatus is the fundamental and veritable instrument and mechanism of character. We laymen can also form a rough mental picture of this complicated nervous system, and of its infinitely complicated workings. I do not propose to go into any technicalities; lest in showing you how much I know of this subject, I should also show you how little I know of it. Dealing mercifully then with my own ignorance, and with the ignorance of those of my hearers who are on my own level, I may say that the little learning which we have scraped together on this subject, has led us vaguely to picture this complicated, nervous structure as a mechanism of highly organized and sensitive atoms, extending to every part of the body, much as a telegraph system runs all over a land and connects every part of it with every other part. And this mechanism supplies the owner with a very imperfect map and mirror of the vast outside universe, and is the only instrument he has to prompt and direct his body in all its dealings with that outside universe. The great majority of my fellow members of this Society would agree with me when I claim that however highly evolved and organized this nervous apparatus may be in a Shakespeare, or a

Newton, or a Darwin, it is yet of the same order, and is composed of the same materials as the nervous system of our fellow creatures—the animals. If anyone is inclined to question this I will relate a little scene that came under my observation last week.

I had driven into the stable-yard of an hotel, and waiting about, I saw a mischievous puppy bolting off with half an ox tongue. An aged terrier also happened to be a witness, and instantly sounded the alarm with a series of rousing barks of "Stop thief!" The ostler rushed out, caught the puppy, took away his prey, and gave him a sound thrashing. Whilst this thrashing was being administered, the aged terrier looked on and wagged his tail—not with any malicious, vindictive delight at the humiliation and punishment of a fellow creature, but with calm, dignified, magisterial approval. In that calm, dispassionate wagging of the tail there was no suggestion of a mere personal concrete triumph. There was only an abstract majestic contemplation of justice being meted out to a criminal, and of satisfaction thereat; and, justice being satisfied, the old terrier hobbled off to his kennel with an evident sense of having performed his duty to society. It would be difficult to classify the action and feeling of that dog as different in kind from the action and feeling of a judge, who having passed a deserved sentence upon a thief or a murderer, went home to a well-earned dinner. I hope you will allow me to claim that this underlying nervous apparatus is the real clock-work and mechanism of character in all living beings, whether animal or human. We may say, indeed, that human character is the inevitable expression and working of a vast and highly evolved nervous structure, whose fundamental plan and lines are the same as the fundamental plan and lines of the nervous structure of the animals that most nearly approach us. It is, of course, enormously more complex, but specialists—like our President—who have given their life to its study, assure us that every human

perception, every human passion, every human feeling, has its exact and special localization in a particular spot or province of this nervous structure. For the moment then, we will look beneath the faces and expressions of our fellow creatures; we will look beneath their most significant and sign-bearing words and actions, and will consider all these as the mere outward expression of a definite, individual nervous structure which is thus giving its own individual responses to the universe, and is acting in its own individual way. If we had sufficiently powerful microscopes, and sufficiently powerful insight and knowledge, we should see that each of these nervous structures has an individual geography of its own—is, indeed, the instrument of an individual human character, and has been organized to act at any given moment in a given way, as surely as an alarm clock will strike at the set minute, or as a bomb will explode when the time-fuse reaches it.

If you have a nervous system constructed in a certain way, and after a certain pattern, it will make its responses to the universe precisely according to its structure and pattern. It will continue to work thus and not otherwise, no matter what maxims of morality and religion your lips may be babbling. When St. Paul said, "That which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do"—when St. Paul said that, he was testifying to the fact that our nervous system works independently of our beliefs, and governs our actions in defiance of our religious notions. And incidentally he was proving that it is better to have a sound nervous system than a set of sound theological opinions. As, indeed, many religious people are busily demonstrating in the present day.

We are here raising the old question of determination and free-will. I hasten to assure you that I will carefully abstain from settling that controversy to-night.

I merely point it out to you incidentally, as one of the attendant conundrums that I promised to raise during the evening.

Now here we are with countless millions of separate brain structures—all of them with kindred fundamental passions, thoughts, and feelings; all of them so much alike as to be classified as human; all of them, with fundamental resemblances to our fellow creatures—the animals; but, at the same time, each of them special, separate, individual, distinct; inasmuch as although these fundamental qualities are all there, they are yet arranged in infinitely varying proportions, and in infinitely varying relations.

Having led you thus far without in the least touching upon the main subject of my lecture, and without having given you any enlightenment upon the question that has brought us together, I may perhaps humbly inquire of my fellow members of the Ethological Society whether the science of human character may not be likened to the science of irregular verbs?

Consider what it means, adequately and scientifically to sum up any one individual character, and represent a clear image of it to yourself. Begin upon your own character. Have you ever tried to render a definite concise account of it to yourself? Dare you try to sum it up? Start the inquiry upon the character of the person you know best (or think you know best); then try it upon your intimate friends, and lastly, upon any of your casual acquaintances. I shall have gained my point if I have made you feel that the science of human character is enormously difficult; that its data are so diffuse, concrete, and irreconcilable as to make it almost impossible to classify them. And I am speaking here of isolated human character, of human character in a vacuum, and without the impediment of the thousand interfering conditions that govern it when it is transplanted to a work of art.

Consider how difficult it must be scientifically to

sum up, and scientifically to represent a human character in a work of art. There are certain memorable delineations of character both in fiction and in drama, which, whether they are scientifically true or not, do give us the impression of being actually live human beings. Many of these will at once recur to your memory. I have not time to attempt the analysis of any of the great characters in fiction. I will simply mention one example of a human character, finely and faithfully observed, exhaustively portrayed, and so far scientifically right as to be beyond the reach of cavil—I will mention Flaubert's marvellous study of Madame Bovary.

But in the exact and exhaustive presentation of character, the novelist has an enormous advantage over the dramatist. To begin with, he has infinitely more space for characteristic detail. Then again, he is not subject to the dramatist's limitations in the matter of the change of scene. In the course of a single chapter he can skip through a dozen different scenes. Further and chiefly (and this is both a great advantage and a great disadvantage) the novelist has the opportunity of direct narrative, direct description. It is here that the novelist's task is made transcendently easy compared with the task of the dramatist. The result of the novelist wielding this power of direct narrative, direct description, is that when you compare the number of life-like characters that you meet in fiction with the number of corresponding characters that you meet in drama, you will find that fiction can be credited with hundreds of them, while the drama can claim only a comparatively small number.

Here again I ask you to weigh the enormous difficulties a dramatist meets the moment he stands up, fair and square, to delineate a character, and to challenge a comparison with his giant exemplar and antagonist—Nature. First of all, Nature has from thirty to seventy years in which to portray every detail of a human character; the dramatist has from ten minutes to half

an hour. Now owing to this enormous difference between the size of Nature's canvas and the canvas of the dramatist, how little can any of the actions and words of the dramatist's character in any given scene and place, be realistically and exactly like the words and actions of the same character, painted by Nature, with her infinite scope, her infinite carelessness as to consistency, as to design, as to what we regard as moral or immoral purpose.

If we could, in one swift glance, sweep across the seventy years of most men's lives, so as instantly to conjure up their entire characters before us in all their details, I suppose the one prevailing impression would be one of purposeless inconsistency, drifting and futility. Apart from the very few lives that seem to have started with a clear purpose, and after infinite dodging and tacking to have accomplished it—apart from these chosen few, surely the distinctive sign and hall mark of human character, is careless inconsistency, indecision, and absence of aim, except that of providing for the gross necessities of life, and some tawdry pleasures.

Now our Chairman will tell you that a conflict between human wills, between characters that start with clearly conceived and opposing purposes, is the very essence of drama. A wavering, undecided character is of all characters the most irritating in drama—as it is in real life. It is an enormous tribute to Shakespeare, that it is only he who has been able to make wavering and drifting characters, such as Hamlet and Richard the Second, supremely interesting as protagonists of drama. From this enormous difference in the conditions which bind the dramatist as compared with Nature—from this arises the fact that while Nature mainly shows human beings as mere disjointed bundles of inconsistencies, the dramatist has mainly to show them as concise, homogeneous, purposeful, direct, and moving towards a self-conscious end. We may say indeed, "Inconsistency of character is what Nature

mainly shows of human beings. Consistency of character is what is demanded of the dramatist when he tries to show them."

Again, every one of the dramatist's characters has to be delineated in a sharply-outlined scheme of action; and has to be strictly subordinated, or rather reconciled, to the contingencies and necessities of that scheme of action.

Here I dare to whisper a word of the most friendly suggestion to two or three brilliant members of my own craft, with whom I am in the greatest sympathy in their efforts to bring what they call "ideas" into the modern English drama. I venture with due humility to affirm that a play to be permanently successful, to have a secure hold upon any theatre-going public that is, or ever will be, in existence—that a play to be so far successful, must be a definite, connected series of doings, and not an indefinite, unconnected series of sayings. Pour as many ideas as you please into your play—open your treasures of philosophy, ram your moral purpose down the throats of the public; but do all this implicitly, and as it were unconsciously, behind a carefully planned scheme of action. If you cannot do this, put your ideas and your philosophy into a pamphlet. They will have a longer and firmer hold upon the public, and you will achieve your purpose more surely and effectively than if you put them into a formless invertebrate play. Take notice, however, that your purpose is not an artistic, but a controversial one. So please be careful not to call yourself an artist.

I hope my present audience, and my brother playwrights, will pardon me this little digression. Let us return to the necessity that is laid upon the dramatist, always to convey character in, and by means of, a scheme of action; and generally by the action of the character himself.

How is character finally expressed in real life? Inevitably by the man's actions. How is character to

be finally expressed in drama? Inevitably by the man's actions. There is in real life, a great and eternal contrast between men's words and men's deeds. To win your assent to this statement, I need only invite you carefully to compare your own words with your own deeds. What any particular person says on the stage or in real life, is often a very uncertain index or revelation of character, as compared with what he does. Joe Gargery in "Great Expectations," you will remember, formed a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the worthiness of his father's character. His epitaph on Mr. Gargery senior ran as follows:

Whatsomever were the failings on 'is part,
Remember, reader, he were ever that good in 'is 'eart.

But the only fragment of Mr. Gargery's history that we have been able to discover, sets forth the fact that he used to get drunk and turn his wife and children out of doors on snowy nights. And when we compare it with the epitaph, we immediately judge the character of Mr. Gargery senior from his actions, and register a distrust of pious biographies.

The inability of a dramatist to bring the actions of his character into agreement with his conception of that character, was amusingly illustrated in a melodrama I saw many years ago. The scene was laid in Cairo, at the time of Arabi Pasha's rising in Egypt. The English Colony was besieged in Cairo and were in great peril. From outside the walls, came the angry and menacing shouts of Arabi's followers for the lives of the besieged English residents. Inside, an English Banker determined to show his courage, and to go upon the walls and address the turbulent mob outside. His wife and friends begged him to stay where he was. "No, I will go and speak to them and quell them." "For heaven's sake, don't," his friends beseeched. He however mounted the ladder and showed himself above the walls. A pistol shot instantly followed, and he fell dead before he could

speak a word. The audience roared with laughter. What the dramatist intended to show was the desperate character of the besiegers outside, and the intrepid character of the English Banker. What the dramatist did really show, was that the banker was a great fool to go and get shot, when all his friends had persuaded him to stay in safety where he was.

Character, I affirm, should always be strictly related to the scheme of action of the play. I do not claim that the neat and cunning construction of a plot, is a higher achievement than the faithful presentation of a human character. Indeed, in any art, the portrayal of a human character is the highest achievement of which any artist is capable. But I do say that the plot, the scheme of action, will in most instances inevitably direct and shape the dramatist's presentation of a character, whatever his conception of that character may be. The nature of the relation of plot to character is well shown by comparing the character of Antony in *Julius Caesar* with the character of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare may be said to have drawn entirely distinct Antonys in the two plays. The real Antony may indeed have done and said all that the dramatist has ascribed to him in both plays. But the scheme of action in the respective plays, compels the dramatist to present wholly different sides of Antony's character; so much so, that the two Antonys might well be different men. From this we may gather that when the character does not run on all fours with the plot, the plot will necessarily govern, and may wholly distort the dramatist's conception of the character. Here I venture to say (with all due deference to our Chairman) we have a confirmation of Aristotle's rule that "The plot is the first thing in a play." I do not say the plot is the chief thing. But it is the first thing. You cannot build a house unless you first get your elevation right. I hope I am beginning to show you the enormous difficulties the dramatist encounters when he tries to put before a

modern audience anything like a scientific delineation of character.

Let me bring before you some further facts and considerations that will perhaps increase your appreciation of our difficulties. Most of us are acquainted with the apparently inexplicable tricks and caprices sometimes indulged in by this nervous apparatus of ours. I have said that we are all connoisseurs of human character. Doubtless most of us who have knocked about the world are rough, and at times shrewd and penetrating, judges of the characters that we meet. I think that women have more instant penetration into character than men, or shall we say, they have a swifter instinct for it?

But there are facts which seem to baffle the most learned of us. I suppose most of us mainly judge a character by its one or two most dominant and significant notes. Thus, we think of one man as prudent, another as courageous, another as ambitious, another as crafty, another as a kind father, another as a keen business man. But what are we to say when we find that a man who has been a prudent, careful householder and taxpayer all his life, meets with a shock or injury; and becomes, not a damaged and battered image of his former self, but something exactly the opposite? Thus an equable, temperate man becomes a savage drunkard; a modest, dignified man becomes a bragging, babbling fool. The nervous apparatus works, or seems to work, not merely in a subdued and lowered way, but apparently in a clean contrary direction; as though all the forces that went to build up character had been reversed. It is an alarming thought that good reputable citizens like ourselves, who have built up our characters with so much effort and care and forethought, may suddenly find ourselves not with reduced and impoverished assets in the virtues we have so sedulously cultivated, but in possession of vast stores of their opposite and contrary vices? How can we attach

responsibility when the most virtuous character is seen to be at the mercy of the merest accident? May not the man who has always displayed vicious qualities, ascribe them likewise to an accident, the accident of his possession of a faulty brain structure at birth?

Here we seem to be brought to an emphatic disproof of free will. But instinctively the Western European mind revolts from fatalism, however plainly it may seem to be indicated by the facts of brain structure and brain action. Instinctively we feel that the surrender of his free will and responsibility, is the greatest humiliation that any human being can submit to—the most ignoble misfortune that can befall him.

“That man I count as lost
Whose mind allows a plan
That would degrade it most.”

And Western Christendom has shown itself ready to buy free will at the cost of eternal suffering. Without the implicit acceptance of free will, human character becomes no more than a pebble in a sand-drift—“rolled round in earth’s diurnal course, with rocks and stones and trees.” Without the assumption of free will, you can have no drama.

Let us leave the puzzle of free will, and take up another puzzle of character; the strange and bewildering fact of multiple personality. We find that certain men and women (more women than men) manifest wholly different personalities and characters during certain divided portions of their lives. Instances of double personality are, I daresay, familiar to you all; where a certain person leads two wholly separate lives, manifesting in each of them wholly different dispositions; being wholly oblivious in the one state of everything that happens in the alternate state. Occasionally, a human nervous apparatus will run amuck, and work so capriciously as to split the life of its possessor into as many as ten different compartments of consciousness;

each distinct from the other; each indicating a totally distinct character, at variance from all the other characters, but consistent with itself; each different state of consciousness declaring itself in actions, moods, gestures, memories, and mental capacities appropriate to and possessed by itself alone, and unrelated to the other states?

What shall we say about Mary Barnes? (I quote from Dr. Albert Wilson's "Education, Personality, and Crime.")

Mary Barnes exhibited "ten phases of sub-personality, each of which was a distinct and separate life. No one personality knew anything of the others, nor yet of the normal life. . . . These sub-personalities differed completely in character. . . . B₁ was a condition of mania or excitement. . . . As B₂ she was quite ignorant, requiring to be completely re-educated. . . . B₃ was a mischievous romping girl. In this condition she was taken to the seaside, and though in her normal state she knew the sea, yet now as B₃ she beheld it for the first time. When she revisited the same place the next year, in a different personality as B₆, it was again to her as a new sight. She learned to swim in one personality, B₃, but later could not swim in the B₆ condition. In another phase, B₉, she was blind, and developed a new faculty, perhaps a legacy from some remote ancestor. This was the power to draw; drawing entirely by touch, even to the detecting of colour. B₉ was imbecile. This case of Mary Barnes is of value to our present subject because one state, B₁₀, was of criminal appearance. As A, or normal, she was a girl of the very highest *morale*, and the simplest wrong-doing was an absolute horror to her. Yet as B₁₀ she was a thief, and only by chance saved from murder. The theft was a very ordinary one, from a shop door. On seeing a policeman she ran back, replaced the article, but justified the theft on the same lines of thought as a criminal would. 'If you want a thing and

can't get it, why nick it. No harm if you are not found out.'"

Certainly no dramatist would dare to play the mischievous pranks with human character that Nature does.

But you say these eccentricities of character are abnormalities, closely allied to mental disease. That is true; but it is only by the careful study and exploration of disease that we learn the laws of health. What has the recital of these strange cases of aberration of character to do with the delineation of character in drama?

Is not every character, even every ordinary healthy character, to a great extent a multiple character, a multiple personality? It does not indeed, except occasionally in dreams and fevers, split into differing and contradictory and unrelated states of consciousness. But none the less, is it not a multiple character? Are we not all, like the Prophet Habakkuk, "capable de tout," by the fact that the nervous apparatus of each one of us, is comprehensive and representative more or less of all humanity? Have we not all infinitely complex characters, ready under due provocation to work in the most irregular, capricious, and unexpected ways? I leave this suggestion to you, with the entreaty that if at any time you should find a character of mine behaving in some extraordinarily capricious way, you will generously ascribe it to my attempt scientifically to follow Nature in her more secret processes; and that you will not rashly put it down to faulty perception or execution of character on my part.

I come back to firm ground by saying that every man's character is largely composed of qualities, feelings, passions, thoughts which he possesses in common with all his fellow human creatures. It is generally by likenesses in any character to ourselves; by the exhibition of ways of speaking, feeling and acting, that are most like our own ways of speaking, feeling and

acting, that we judge of the truthfulness of a character in fiction or drama. The old dramatists used to label their characters by a single quality, or by their trade or profession. There is a great deal to be said for this way of naming characters in drama. It by no means shuts out the opportunity of quite faithful and truthful character-drawing. When a dramatist calls his character "Sir John Brute," we do not puzzle as to what deep-sea curiosity he has fished up from the abyss of human nature. We know exactly the sort of man we are going to meet. The fact that he has thus labelled his character with one quality will not prevent him from giving us a real living human being, if he has faithfully observed or conceived that human being. One is glad to see that this habit of labelling a character by its leading note or profession is not extinct amongst us. In Oscar Wilde's brilliant farce, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a certain type of clergyman is called "Dr. Chasuble."

And where will you find truer, more satisfying, more complete and more dramatic exhibitions of human character than in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress"? Almost every one of Bunyan's characters is labelled with a certain quality or habit. He may be before us for only half a dozen minutes and speak only half a dozen sentences, but we feel at once that Bunyan has created a veritable human being, and has told us everything about him. We know Bunyan's characters as thoroughly as we should have known them if we had met them in real life. Again, take "Falstaff" in *Henry IV*. Here is a complete full-length portrait of a very distinctive human being. We could not know more about Falstaff if we had been one of his companions, probably not so much. One feels that one would give the whole bundle of laboured, modern, pretentious so-called psychological studies for a mere limb of one of Bunyan's characters, a little finger of Falstaff.

Again to revert for one moment to the multiple

personalities that exist in all of us. How they seem to be summed up in Hamlet! Hamlet is in many ways a wayward, contradictory character, and yet what an impression he gives us, not indeed of a photograph taken from real life, but of a large summary, a supreme reality of humanity.

The general advance of science has led everywhere to a demand for more precision, more searching exactitude. There is a sense in which science and art are opposed to each other. There is a sense in which science and art are different aspects of the same thing.

We find on the modern stage a demand for minute and exact photographs of our contemporaries. We are less concerned with types, more concerned with individuals. If the modern dramatist is to be called upon to give realistic and scientific delineations of character, he is surely entitled to ask for their precise duplicates in real life to play them. For instance, suppose a modern dramatist had put into his play a study of feminine character—say *Madame Bovary*. It could not of course be done by the methods of Flaubert, by the patient accumulation of endless details. The dramatist might know his *Madame Bovary* as thoroughly and searchingly as Flaubert did. He could not draw her in the same way. To begin with, many of the exact touches given by Flaubert would have to be left to the personality, voice, features, gestures, and idiosyncrasies of the actress. And these individual marks of character in any given actress might be totally different from those the dramatist had imagined. Indeed the dramatist's *Madame Bovary* might be played with equal effect and conviction by a dozen different actresses, all of them with distinct, and sometimes with opposing, outward personalities and manners. So Hamlet may be played with much the same effect, and may give much the same impression of character, by actors with wholly varying or opposed personalities. The same is true of *Hedda*

Gabblers, though she seems to be drawn with great precision, and with a definite idea of one definite personality in her creator's mind. But she can be clothed with equal effect by the varying personalities of many actresses. The fact is, if a dramatist has clearly conceived and drawn a living character, it is astonishing what a number of varying actors with varying personalities can play it with equal effect, and to much the same result upon the audience. The converse is true. If a dramatist has drawn a character with certain marked qualities, or peculiarities, his creation may be maimed or altogether destroyed by an actor with a wrong, or deficient, or contradictory personality. It matters comparatively little what the dramatist has conceived or drawn, if the personality and manner and methods of the actor are contradictory to the main features of the character. Here I raise a large question, which I have only time to glance at. We are often helped, enormously helped, by actors who give form and body to characters that we have perhaps only vaguely and uncertainly sketched. But equally we are sometimes hindered, and defeated, and misrepresented by the actor's wrong personality or methods. And we have no means of redress, no means of explanation. If you demand of your dramatists the exact and scientific portrayal of modern English men and women on the stage, you should place him in a position to command those actors and actresses who will give an exact and scientific representation of what he has conceived. But the dramatist will always be most permanently successful when he deals with character in its large, broad, universal aspects, rather than when he deals with its minute, temporary, and local peculiarities. And these larger aspects of character have to be rendered in a larger and looser, but not necessarily in a less truthful way.

Broadly there are two different ways of painting character in drama, as there are two different ways of

painting a portrait—the one is minute, realistic, individual, and aims at scientific exactness; the other is large, imaginative, inexact; the one is done by the methods of the photographer, the other is done by the methods of the oil painter; the one is done chiefly from painstaking observation and cataloguing; the other, so far as one can describe the process, is imagined from memory. Of course all great permanent characters are done by a combination of these two methods, but the delineator will lean to one or the other of them according to his temperament, training, and aspirations. If you ask me what is the secret of successful character painting in drama, I am unable to tell you. I suppose it is something akin to the secret of successful cooking. All cooks use much the same ingredients, but they turn out very different dinners. All dramatists deal with the same raw materials of human nature, but they turn out very different human characters. The result in each case depends much upon the training, skill, knowledge, and inspiration of the cook or the dramatist.

But it depends more largely upon a personal touch, a personal knack.

It is the personal view of the artist, his individual way of looking at character that gives its rarest value to a human portrait.

XII

ON READING MODERN PLAYS

June, 1906.

IN April, 1891, soon after the passing of the Anglo-American copyright law, I made a strong appeal to English and American dramatists to publish their plays, and to the playgoing public to read them. This was interpreted in England as a presumptuous attempt on the part of a mere playwright to "shove in amongst the worthy bidden guests" of literature. I was bantered, and admonished to pocket the royalties coming from my plays, and therewith to be content. I have, however, continued to advocate the publication of plays, and have had the gratification of seeing it gradually become the practice of English and American dramatists. But the results in England have been very meagre and unsatisfactory. No modern English play, however popular, or whatever renown it has won upon the boards, has met with any marked consideration from the great reading public, or has captured a tenth of the circulation of the popular novel. Much of this plentiful lack of interest in the printed play is perhaps due to the fact that it is not generally published until the first run is over. By that time it is no longer the hot sensation of the hour: it has already met with due appreciation in the theatre: it has been discussed at dinner tables, and in the press: it has spent its immediate influence on the mind of the public.

Many managers and actors dislike that the plays in which they are currently appearing shall be put into the hands of the public. So far as the success of the

play depends upon some sensational situation or surprise, this prejudice on the part of the manager is natural, and, to some extent, justifiable. But some leading actors have also a feeling that the publication of a play may endanger their position and popularity with the public—that enormous, theatre-going public, who, in England and America, have scarcely begun to suspect the existence of the author: scarcely begun to suspect that there may be an art of the drama, as well as an art of play-acting: scarcely begun to suspect that the play may have an existence, a vitality and an import of its own, apart from providing a momentary entertainment for the playgoer, and a vehicle for the star actor.

Now I think it would be well if managers and leading actors could be reasoned out of this prejudice against the immediate publication of plays. Surely in France the art of acting, as well as the art of the drama, stands upon an immeasurably higher level than in England; and this is partly due to the differentiation in the public mind of the art of the drama from the art of acting. Each is judged in its relation to the other, and each is also judged on its own merits, instead of being carelessly muddled with the other. The printing of plays tends to secure that the actor and the author shall each receive his rightful guerdon. And in weighing the advantages and disadvantages which would accrue to the actor were every play to be published simultaneously with its production, he may be asked to reflect that the printing and reading of plays tends to raise the intellectual level of the drama, and with it the intellectual quality of the acting, and the intellectual status of the actor. No actor who respects and loves his art, no actor who desires to see it established in the national esteem on the only right and safe grounds, can consistently object to the publication of a play on the eve, or on the morrow of its production.

That such a course would not lower the dignity or deserved popularity of the actor is proved, as I have

said, by the example of France, where great, all-round acting is common in all her large cities : where acting is judged and honoured as the intellectual exponent and companion of an intellectual drama, which playgoers read as well as witness, and which they discuss and judge as literature. When this point of view is seized by actors, I hope they will not be found averse to the publication of current plays. On talking over the matter with a leading American actor, I was delighted to find him at one with me in desiring that the immediate publication and circulation of plays may become an established custom amongst us. If such a custom were general in America and England, it would tend to increase the popularity and influence of the acted drama with that large section of the educated and cultivated public who now stand aloof from the theatre. And to engage the active sympathy of this class, I hold to be most desirable on every account. A widely spread interest in the printed drama is at once the means and the sign, the cause and the effect, of a general betterment of the theatre, and incidentally, of the art of acting. The absence of any interest in the printed drama is to-day, and in our civilization, the mark of a sunken public taste, and of a national drama that does not pretend or care to be anything essentially different from a child's toyshop.

In England, after fifteen years, we are left with little encouragement. Playgoers who lavish time and money to see plays will scarcely spend sixpence to read and examine the stuff that has absorbed all their many million golden hours of leisure, and all their many million golden sovereigns.

But on my visit to America last autumn, I had the great satisfaction of learning from a leading New York publisher that a steady demand is springing up for new editions of modern plays. This demand has arisen indirectly from the courageous and far-seeing action of Professor Baker at Harvard, and Professor Phelps at Yale, who, for some years, have passed their students

through a course of lectures and examinations in contemporary plays. A steadily increasing impulse has thus been given to the study of the modern drama as a branch of literature in all the colleges and schools of America. But apart from this growing interest in educational circles and centres, or perhaps partly because of it, another and wider interest has been fitfully awakened. That benevolent, woolly-brained person who carries the purse, the "general reader," has been stirred to take some little notice of the modern printed drama, as a possibly agreeable means of beguiling his vacant hours. To the general casual reader, who cannot take a railway journey without spending a shilling or two upon some magazine or novel which he immediately rates at its true value by throwing it away as he gets out of the train—to him, with an eye to all his numerous progeny and kin, I beg to offer the following inducements to waste his money upon modern plays rather than upon modern novels:—

(1) A modern play cannot be more foolish and banal, more destructive of whatever literary taste the general reader may possess, or more debilitating to his mind than the average novel wherewith he is wont to enfeeble his brain.

(2) Any modern play which has obtained sufficient success upon the boards to be printed, will probably contain elements of popular amusement and interest which will be exactly to the general reader's liking.

(3) Playreading is rather difficult at first, and so far will provide the general reader with a new mental exercise. But after the first few attempts, when once its shorthand is mastered, playreading becomes easy and stimulating, and will therefore provide the general reader with a new mental pleasure.

(4) A new modern play can be bought at less than half the price of a new modern novel.

(5) By buying plays, the general reader will incidentally encourage the fine arts of acting and

the drama, and so far advance the civilization of his country.

(6) Chief of all reasons, a complete play can be read in about one-fifth of the time that is consumed in reading a novel of average length.

This must needs be a powerful argument in countries like England and America where "time" is said to be "money"—with such strange results. For my proposal is thus seen to be neither more nor less than an endowment of the general reader with perpetual floods of leisure—a charter of ransom to him from the exhausting slavery of the free library of fiction. As it were with a stroke of the pen, with the easy magnificence of a millionaire signing away deeds of gift to every parish in America and England, I instantly restore to our teeming millions of readers four-fifths of the sweet passing scanty hours they were about to squander so carelessly: setting them free to regain their self-respect; or to back horses; or to twiddle their thumbs; or to discuss the nature and purposes of the Immortal Gods, whether of Greece or of England. This last is a suitable pastime for vacant minds.

But if my endowment of the general reader with this vast stretch of leisure gives me any claim to the disposal of it, I would suggest to him that in all fairness one-half of it should be given to reading more plays; and the other half to the most deep and earnest consideration of what he shall read further. Surely this latter occupation would be a wise and profitable one for the general reader in America and England.

The publication of plays affords a test of the reputation of the dramatist, but in our society it may perhaps be more usefully employed as a lever to the taste of the playgoer. Our transitional civilization moves and changes its aspects so swiftly; so swiftly leaps from one scientific discovery to another; so restlessly shifts our habits, our modes of thought, our social and moral estimates; so constantly do we undergo all kinds of

outward and visible, if not of inward and spiritual, transformation, that it is very doubtful whether our modern plays, with their apparatus of minute realistic effects, will have any interest, or influence, or verisimilitude, or significance in the approaching generations. Who can build amongst all these swirling eddies, this floating wreckage of creeds and systems?

Let us rest in great peace about posterity and our reputations.

It is not then merely as the measure of the dramatist's reputation that it is desirable to cultivate a habit of reading plays amongst playgoers—though I believe that a thorough examination of those modern plays which have been most popular and most highly praised would establish a strangely altered estimate of their relative intellectual values. But we may trust Time disdainfully to settle these values before smiling us away into oblivion—us and all our pretensions.

Mr. Brander Matthews has very truly said that many of the plays which thrill and interest us in the theatre will not bear a moment's examination in print. What does this signify? He justly instances *The Two Orphans* as a play of great merit in plot and construction, but quite worthless as literature. Suppose we had been forced to make a diligent and exhaustive study of *The Two Orphans* in print (may God appoint us some other penance) before seeing it for the first time in the theatre, would it then have made the same impression upon us in the theatre? Would not its essential theatricality grin at us all through the performance, and forbid any enjoyment of it?

Again, suppose that before reading the same play, we could gather to its first performance an entire audience of highly critical and cultivated persons on the intellectual level, say, of Aristotle, Lessing, Saint-Beuve and Matthew Arnold, ourselves being allowed a small corner stool behind them. Should we then enjoy it in the theatre, even for the first time?

Does not this imply that our enjoyment of such plays in the theatre depends wholly upon our being swamped in the general mass of uncultivated playgoers, and thereupon lending ourselves to be swayed with them in a good-natured panic of misplaced enthusiasm? Does it not also imply that to the extent the judgment of the average playgoer is informed, and enlarged, and purified by reading plays, to that extent he will cease to enjoy in the theatre those plays which cannot also interest and satisfy him in the study?

It is, therefore, as a lever to the public taste that I continue to urge the diligent publication, and searching study of modern plays. Will not playgoers who constantly apply the test of reading to those plays that have captivated them in the theatre, begin to ask themselves, "Are these the things that we praised and applauded? Were we tricked by this? Did we melt into tears over that? Was it here we shook with laughter; and there, 'impostors to true fear,' that we thrilled and quivered with suspense and alarm? Did we indeed cloy ourselves with all this cheap, sugary sentiment, like good little children debauching their queasy, immature digestions with the sickly messes of a Sunday school treat? Were we so thirsty for amusement that we greedily drank up this green mantle from a stagnant pool of idiocy, these gilded puddles of inanity that beasts would have coughed at? Did we, the supervisors, grossly gape on at these monkey antics, and in the land of Shakespeare, breathlessly acclaim them as dramatic art? Are these the gibes and gambols and songs that last evening set the theatre in a roar, and now in the clear, bright daylight are seen to be as empty of merriment as Yorick's skull—and smell so? Pah!"

The moment the main body of playgoers begin to read and examine current plays, that moment we shall take one firm step towards a national drama.

XIII

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
FREDERICK WHYTE OF M. AUGUSTIN FILON'S "THE
ENGLISH STAGE," PUBLISHED IN 1897.

December, 1896.

I HAVE rarely had a more welcome task than that of saying a few words of introduction to the following essays, and of heartily commending them to the English reading public. I am not called upon, nor would it become me, to recriticise the criticism of the English drama they contain, to reargue any of the issues raised, or to vent my own opinions of the persons and plays hereafter dealt with. My business is to thank M. Filon for bringing us before the notice of the French public, to speak of his work as a whole rather than to discuss it in detail, and to define his position in relation to the recent dramatic movement in our country.

But before addressing myself to these main ends, I may perhaps be allowed to call attention to one or two striking passages and individual judgments. The picture in the first chapter of the old actor's life on circuit is capitally done. I do not know where else to look for so animated and succinct a rendering of that phase of past theatrical life. And the pilgrimage to the deserted Prince of Wales's Theatre also left a vivid impression on me, perhaps quickened by my own early memories. In all that relates to the early Victorian drama M. Filon seems to me a sure and penetrating guide. All lovers of the English drama, as distinguished from that totally different and often antagonistic institution, the English theatre, must be pleased to see M. Filon

stripping the spangles from Bulwer Lytton. To this day Lytton remains an idol of English playgoers and actors, a lasting measure of their judgments both of poetry and of dramatic truth. *The Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu* still rank in many theatrical circles with *Hamlet* as masterpieces of the "legitimate," and *Money* is still bracketed with *The School for Scandal*. It is benevolent of M. Filon to write dramatic criticism about a nation where such estimates have prevailed for half a century.

The criticism on Tennyson as a playwright seems to me equally admirable with the criticism on Bulwer Lytton, and all the more admirable when the two are read in conjunction. Doubtless Tennyson will never be so successful on the boards as Lytton has been. *Becket* is a loose and ill-made play in many respects, and succeeded with the public only because Irving was able to pull it into some kind of unity by buckling round it his great impersonation of the archbishop. But *Becket* contains great things, and is a real addition to our dramatic literature. It would have been a thousand pities if it had failed. On the other hand, the success of Lytton's plays has been a real misfortune to our drama. In his estimates of those two ancient enemies, Tennyson and Lytton, M. Filon has shown a rare power of understanding us, and of entering into the spirit of our nineteenth-century poetic drama—such as it is.

If I may be allowed a word of partial dissent from M. Filon, I would say that he assigns too much space and influence to Robertson. Robertson did one memorable thing: he drew the great and vital tragi-comic figure of Eccles. He drew many other pleasing characters and scenes, most of them as essentially false as the falsities and theatricalities he supposed himself to be superseding. I shall be reminded that in the volume before us M. Filon says that all reforms of the drama pretend to be a return to nature and to truth. I have elsewhere shown that there is no such thing as being consistently and realistically "true to nature" on the stage. *Hamlet*

in many respects is farther away from real life than the shallowest and emptiest farce. It is in the seizure and presentation of the essential and distinguishing marks of a character, of a scene, of a passion, of a society, of a phase of life, of a movement of national thought—it is in the seizure and vivid treatment of some of these, to the exclusion or falsification of non-essentials, that the dramatist must lay his claim to sincerity and to being “true to nature.” And it seems to me that one has only to compare *Caste*, the typical comedy of an English *mésalliance*, with *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, the typical comedy of a French *mésalliance*, to come to the conclusion that in the foundation and conduct of his story Robertson was false and theatrical—theatrical, that is, in the employment of a social contrast that was effective on the stage, but well-nigh, if not quite, impossible in life.

It is of the smallest moment to be “true to nature” in such mint and cummin of the stage as the shutting of a door with a real lock; in the observation of niceties of expression and behaviour; in the careful copying of little fleeting modes and gestures; in the introduction of certain realistic bits of business—it is, I say, of the smallest moment to be “true to nature” in these, if the playwright is false to nature in all the great verities of the heart and spirit of man, if his work as a whole leaves the final impression that the vast, unimaginable drama of human life is as petty and meaningless and empty as our own English theatre. A fair way to measure any dramatist is to ask this question of his work: “Does he make human life as small as his own theatre, so that there is nothing more to be said about either; or does he hint that human life so far transcends any theatre, that all attempts to deal with it on the boards, even the highest, even Hamlet, even *Œdipus*, even Faust, are but shadows and guesses and perishable toys of the stage?”

Robertson has nothing to say to us in 1896. He

drew one great character and many pleasing ones in puerile, impossible schemes, without relation to any larger world than the very narrow English theatrical world of 1865-70.

In his analysis of the influence of Ibsen in England and France, M. Filon seems to touch the right note. I may perhaps be permitted a word of personal explanation in this connection. When I came up to London sixteen years ago, to try for a place among English playwrights, a rough translation from the German version of *The Doll's House* was put into my hands, and I was told that if it could be turned into a sympathetic play, a ready opening would be found for it on the London boards. I knew nothing of Ibsen, but I knew a great deal of Robertson and H. J. Byron. From these circumstances came the adaptation called *Breaking a Butterfly*. I pray it may be forgotten from this time, or remembered only with leniency amongst other transgressions of my dramatic youth and ignorance.

I pass on to speak of M. Filon's work as a whole. For a generation or two past France has held the lead, and rightly held the lead, in the European theatre. She has done this by virtue of a peculiar innate dramatic instinct in her people; by virtue of great traditions and thorough methods of training; by virtue of national recognition of her dramatists and actors, and national pride in them; and by virtue of the freedom she has allowed to her playwrights. So far as they have abused that freedom, so far as they have become the mere purveyors of sexual eccentricity and perversity, so far the French drama has declined. So cunningly economic is Nature, she will slip in her moral by hook or by crook. There cannot be an intellectual effort in any province of art without a moral implication.

But France, though her great band of playwrights is broken up, still lords it over the European drama, or rather, over the European theatre. There is still a feeling among our upper-class English audiences that

a play, an author, an actor and actress, are good *because* they are French. There is, or has been, a sound reason for that feeling. And there is still, as M. Filon says in his Preface, a corresponding feeling in France that "there is no such thing as an English drama." There has been an equally sound reason for that feeling. M. Filon has done us the great kindness of trying to remove it. We still feel very shy in coming before our French neighbours; like humble, honest, poor relations who are getting on a little in the world, and would like to have a nod from our aristocratic kinsfolk. We are uneasy about the reception we shall meet, and nervous and diffident in making our bow to the French public. A nod from our aristocratic relations, a recognition from France, might be of so much use in our parish here at home. For in all matters of the modern drama England is no better than a parish, with "parochial" judgments, "parochial" instincts, and "parochial" ways of looking at things. There is not a breath of national sentiment, a breath of national feeling; there is no width of view, in the way English playgoers regard their drama.

M. Filon has sketched in the following pages the history of the recent dramatic movement in England. If I were asked what was the distinguishing mark of that movement, I should say that during the years when it was in progress there was a steadfast and growing attempt to treat the great realities of our modern life upon our stage; to bring our drama into relation with our literature, our religion, our art, and our science, and to make it reflect the main movements of our national thought and character. That anything great or permanent was accomplished I am the last to claim; all was crude, confused, tentative, aspiring. But there was *life* in it. Again I shall be reminded that dramatic reformers always pretend that they return to nature and truth, and are generally found out by the next generation to be stale and theatrical impostors. But if any one will take the trouble to examine the leading

English plays of the last ten years, and will compare them with the *serious* plays of our country during the last three centuries, I shall be mistaken if he will not find evidence of the beginnings, the first small shoots of an English drama of greater import and vitality, and of wider aim than any school of drama the English theatre has known since the Elizabethans. The brilliant Restoration comedy makes no pretence to be a national drama: neither do the comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith. There was no possibility of a great national English drama between Milton and the French Revolution, any more than there was a possibility of a great school of English poetry. And the feelings that were let loose after the convulsions of 1793 did not in England run in the direction of the drama. It is only within the present generation that great masses of Englishmen have begun to frequent the theatre. And as our vast city population began to get into a habit of playgoing, and our theatres became more crowded, it seemed not too much to hope that a school of English drama might be developed amongst us, and that we might induce more and more of our theatre-goers to find their pleasure in seeing their lives portrayed at the theatre, rather than in running to the theatre to escape from their lives.

After considerable advances had been made in this direction, the movement became obscured and burlesqued, and finally the British public fell into what Macaulay calls one of its periodical panics of morality. In that panic the English drama disappeared for the time, and at the moment of writing it does not exist. There are many excellent entertainments at our different theatres, and most of them are deservedly successful. But in the very height of this theatrical season there is not a single London theatre that is giving a play that so much as pretends to picture our modern English life, —I might almost say that pretends to picture human life at all. I have not a word to say against these various entertainments. I have been delighted with

some of them, and heartily welcome their success. But what has become of the English drama that M. Filon has given so many of the following pages to discuss and dissect? I wish M. Filon would devote another article in the *Revue des deux Mondes* to explain to his countrymen what has taken place in the English theatre since his articles were written. It needs a Frenchman to explain, and a French audience to understand, the full comedy of the situation.

For ten years the English theatre-going public had been led to take an increasing interest in their national drama—I mean the drama as a picture of life in opposition to a funny theatrical entertainment—and during those ten years that drama had grown in strength of purpose, in largeness of aim, in vividness of character-painting, in every quality that promised England a living school of drama. It began to deal with the great realities of modern English life. It was pressing on to be a real force in the spiritual and intellectual life of the nation. It began to attract the attention of Europe. But it became entangled with another movement, got caught in the skirts of the sexual-pessimistic blizzard sweeping over North Europe, was confounded with it, and was execrated and condemned without examination. I say without examination. Let any one turn to the newspapers of November, 1894, and read the correspondence which began the assault on the modern school of English drama. Let him discover, if he can, in the letters of those who attacked it, what notions they had as to the relations of morality to the drama. It will interest M. Filon's countrymen to know that British playwrights were condemned in the interests of British morality. And when one tried to find out what particular system of morality the English public was trying to force upon its dramatists, one discovered that it was precisely that system of morality which is practised amongst wax dolls. Not the broad, genial, worldly morality of Shakespeare; not the deep, devious,

confused, but most human morality of the Bible; not a high, severe, ascetic morality; not even a sour, grim, puritanic morality. No! let any candid inquirer search into this matter and try to get at the truth of it, and ask what has been the recent demand of English playgoers in this matter, and he will find it is for a wax-doll morality.

Now, there is much to be said for the establishment of a system of wax-doll morality, not only on the English stage, but also in the world at large. And all of us who have properly-regulated minds must regret that, through some unaccountable oversight, it did not occur to Providence to carry on the due progress and succession of the human species by means of some such system.

I say it must have been an oversight. For can we doubt that, had this excellent method suggested itself, it would have been instantly adopted? Can we suppose that Providence would have deliberately rejected so sweetly pretty and simple an expedient for putting a stop to immorality, not only on the English stage to-day, but everywhere and always?

I know there is a real dilemma. But surely those of us who are truly reverent will suspect Providence of a little nodding and negligence in this matter, rather than of virtual complicity with immorality—for that is what the only alternate hypothesis amounts to.

But seeing that, by reason of this lamentable oversight of Providence, English life is not sustained and renewed by means of wax-doll morality, what is a poor playwright to do? I am quite aware that what is going on in English life has nothing whatever to do with what is going on at the English theatres in the autumn of 1896. Still, like Caleb Plummer, in a matter of this kind one would like to get "as near natur' as possible;" or, at least, not to falsify and improve her beyond all chance of recognition. I hope I shall not be accused of any feeling of enmity against wax-doll morality in the

abstract. I think it a most excellent, nay, a perfect theory of morals. The more I consider it, the more eloquent I could grow in its favour. I do not mean to practise it myself, but I do most cordially recommend it to all my neighbours.

To return. The newspaper correspondence showed scarcely a suspicion that morality on the stage meant anything else than shutting one's eyes alike to facts and to truth, and making one's characters behave like wax dolls. As to the bent and purpose of the dramatist, there was so little of the dramatic sense abroad, that an act of a play which was written to ridicule the detestable, cheap, paradoxical affectations of vice and immorality current among a certain section of society was censured as being an attempt to *copy* the thing it was *satirising*! So impossible is it to get the average Englishman to distinguish for a moment between the dramatist and his characters. The one notion that the public got into its head was that we were a set of gloomy corrupters of youth, and it hooted accordingly. Now, I do not deny that many undesirable things, many things to regret, many extreme things, and some few unclean things, fastened upon the recent dramatic movement. And so far as it had morbid issues, so far as it tended merely to distress and confuse, so far as it painted vice and ugliness for their own sakes, so far it was rightly and inevitably condemned; nay, so far it condemned and destroyed itself. But these, I maintain, were side-tendencies. They were not the essence of the movement. They were the extravagances and confusions that always attend a revival, whether in art or religion. And by the general public, who can never get but one idea, and never more than one side of that idea, into its head at a time, these extravagances and side-shoots are taken for the very heart of the movement.

Take the Oxford movement. Did the great British public get a glimmer of Newman's lofty idea of the continual indwelling miraculous spiritual force of the

Church? No. It got a notion into its head that a set of rabid, dishonest bigots were trying to violate the purity of its Protestant religion; so it hooted and howled, stamped upon the movement, and went back to hug the sallow corpse of Evangelicalism for another quarter of a century. The movement was thought to be killed. But it was only scotched, and it is the one operative force in the English Church to-day.

Take, again, the æsthetic movement. Did the great British public get a glimmer of William Morris's lofty idea of making every home in England beautiful? No. It got a notion into its head that a set of idiotic fops had gone crazy in worship of sunflowers; so it giggled and derided, and went back to its geometric-patterned Brussels carpets, its flock wall-papers, and all the damnable trumpery of Tottenham Court Road. The movement was thought to be killed, but it was only scotched; and whatever beauty there is in English interiors, whatever advance has been made in decorating our homes, is due to that movement. Again, to compare small things with great, in the recent attempt to give England a living national drama, we have been judged not upon the essence of the matter, but upon certain extravagances and side-tendencies. The great public got a notion into its head that a set of gloomy, vicious persons had conspired to corrupt the youth of our nation by writing immoral plays. And the untimely accident of a notorious prosecution giving some colour to the opinion, no further examination was made of the matter. A clean sweep was made of the whole business, and a rigid system of wax-doll morality established forthwith; so far, that is, as the modern prose drama is concerned. But this wax-doll morality is only forced upon the serious drama of modern life. It is not forced upon farce, or musical comedy. It is only the serious dramatist who has been gagged and handcuffed. Adultery is still an excellent joke in a farce, provided it is conveyed by winks and nods. The whole body of

a musical comedy may reek with cockney indecency and witlessness, and yet no English mother will sniff offence, provided it is covered up with dances and songs. I repeat that if a thorough examination is made of the matter, it will be found that the recent movement has been judged upon a small side-issue.

We may hope that the English translation of M. Filon's work will do something to reinstate us in the good opinion of our countrymen. I think, if his readers will take his cue that during the last few years there has been an earnest attempt on the part of a few writers to establish a living English drama, that is, a drama, which within necessary limitations and conventions, has set out with a determination to see English life as it really is, and to paint English men and women as they really are—I think if playgoers will take that cue from M. Filon, they will get a better notion of the truth of the case than if they still regard us as gloomy and perverse corrupters of English youth.

A passage from George Meredith may perhaps serve to indicate the position of the English drama at the present moment, and to point in what direction its energies should lie when the gags and handcuffs are removed, and the stiffness gets out of its joints. At the opening of *Diana of the Crossways* these memorable words occur :—

“Then, ah! then, moreover, will the novelist's art (and the dramatist's), now neither blushless infant nor executive man, have attained its majority. We can then be veraciously historical, honestly transcriptive. Rose-pink and dirty drab will alike have passed away. Philosophy is the foe of both, and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantasm falseness reigns, will no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife. Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that, instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the

sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight. Do but perceive that we are coming to philosophy, the stride toward it will be a giant's—a century a day. And imagine the celestial refreshment of having a pure decency in the place of sham; real flesh; a soul born active, wind-beaten, but ascending. Honourable will fiction (and the drama) then appear; honourable, a fount of life, an aid to life, quick with our blood. Why, when you behold it you love it,—and you will not encourage it?—or only when presented by dead hands? Worse than that alternative dirty drab, your recurring rose-pink is rebuked by hideous revelations of the filthy foul; for nature will force her way, and if you try to stifle her by drowning she comes up, not the fairest part of her uppermost! Peruse your Realists—really your castigators, for not having yet embraced philosophy. As she grows in the flesh when discreetly tended, nature is unimpeachable, flower-like, yet not too decoratively a flower; you must have her with the stem, the thorns, the roots, and the fat bedding of roses. In this fashion she grew, says historical fiction; thus does she flourish now, would say the modern transcript, reading the inner as well as exhibiting the outer.

“And how may you know that you have reached to philosophy? You touch her skirts when you share her hatred of the sham decent, her derision of sentimentalism. You are one with her when—but I would not have you a thousand years older! Get to her, if in no other way, by the sentimental route:—that very winding path, which again and again brings you round to the point of original impetus, where you have to be unwound for another whirl; your point of original impetus being the grossly material, not at all the spiritual. It is most true that sentimentalism springs from the former, merely and badly aping the latter;—fine flower, or pinnacle flame-spire, of sensualism that it is, could it do other?—and accompanying the former it traverses tracks of desert, here and there crouching in a garden, catching with one hand at fruits, with another at colours; imagining a secret ahead, and goaded by an appetite sustained by sheer gratifications. Fiddle in harmonics as it may, it will have these gratifications at all costs. Should none be discoverable, at once you are at the Cave of Despair, beneath the funeral orb of Glaucoma, in the thick midst of poinarded, slit-throat

rope-dependent figures, placarded across the bosom Disillusioned, Infidel, Agnostic, Miserrimus. This is the sentimental route to advancement. Spirituality does not light it; evanescent dreams are its oil-lamps, often with wick askant in the socket.

"A thousand years! You may count full many a thousand by this route before you are one with divine philosophy. Whereas a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the senses, Reality's infinite sweetness; for these things are in philosophy; and the fiction (and drama) which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy's elect handmaiden."

"Dirty drab and rose-pink, with their silly cancelling contest"—does not that sum up the English drama of the last few years? There was certainly a shade too much dirty drab outside a while back, but within there was *life*. What life is there in the drama that has followed? Where does it paint one living English character? Where does it touch one single interest of our present life, one single concern of man's body, soul, or spirit? What have these rose-pink revels of wax dolls to do with the immense, tragic, incoherent Babel around us, with all its multifold interests, passions, beliefs, and aspirations? When will philosophy come to our aid and depose this silly rose-pink wax-doll morality?

"But," says the British mother, "I must have plays that I can take my daughters to see."

"Quite so, my dear ma'am, and so you shall. But do you let your daughters read the Bible? The great realities of life are there handled in a far plainer and more outrageous way than they are ever handled on the English stage, and yet I cannot bring myself to think that the Bible has had a corrupt influence on the youth of our nation. Do you let them read Shakespeare? Again there is the freest handling of all these subjects, and again I cannot think that Shakespeare is a corrupter of English youth."

The question of verbal indecency or grossness has really very little to do with the matter. A few centuries ago English gentlewomen habitually used words and spoke of matters in a way that would be considered disgusting in a smoking-room to-day. We may be very glad to have outgrown the verbal coarseness of former generations. But we are not on that account to plume ourselves on being the more moral. It is a matter of taste and custom, not of morality.

The real knot of the question is in the method of treating the great passions of humanity. If the English public sticks to its present decision that these passions are not to be handled at all, then no drama is possible. We shall continue our revels of wax dolls, and our theatres will provide entertainments, not drama. I do not shut my eyes to the fact that many of the greatest concerns of human life lie, to a great extent, outside the sexual question; and many great plays have been, and can be, written without touching upon these matters at all. But the general public will have none of them. The general public demands a love-story, and insists that it shall be the main interest of the play. And every English playwright knows that to offer the public a pure love-story is the surest way of winning a popular success. He knows that if he treats of unlawful love he imperils his chances and tends to drive away whole classes—one may say, the great majority of playgoers.

“Then why be so foolish as to do it?” is the obvious reply.

The dramatist has no choice. He is as helpless as Balaam, and can as little tune his prophesying to a foregone pleasing issue. A certain story presents itself to him, forces itself upon him, takes shape and coherence in his mind, becomes organic. The story comes automatically, grows naturally and spontaneously from what he has observed and experienced in the world around him; he cannot alter its drift or reverse its significance without murdering his artistic instincts and impulses,

and making his play a dead, mechanical thing. There are many stories which treat of pure love thwarted and baffled and at last rewarded. I do not say that these stories may not be worth telling. But it is guilt and sin which give the great dramatist his chance. Tragedy, like religion, is the fine flower of a perception of the sanctity and deep significance of life; and of an apprehension of a besetting supernatural power, whose ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts, and are past finding out. That perception gives Tragedy its "pity"; that apprehension gives Tragedy its "terror." Therefore our modern realistic tragedy is of a low order. It needs a background.

From the nature of the case, the course of a lawful love, though it may not run altogether smooth, does not offer the same tremendous opportunities to the dramatist. In affairs of love, as in those of war, happy are they who have no history! Almost all the great love-stories of the world have been stories of unlawful love, and many of the great plays of the world are built round stories of unlawful love. David and Bathsheba, "the tale of Troy divine," Agamemnon, Œdipus, Phædra, Tristram and Iseult, Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, Abelard and Heloïse, Paolo and Francesca, Faust and Margaret, Burns and his Scotch lassies, Nelson and Lady Hamilton—what have these to do with wax-doll morality? What has wax-doll morality to do with them?

I know the question is a difficult one. Much may be said for the French custom of keeping young girls altogether away from the theatre. I believe Dumas *filis* did not allow his daughter to see any of his plays before she was married—a fact that reminds one of Mr. Brooke's delightful suggestion to Casaubon—"Get Dorothea to read you light things—Smollett—*Roderick Random*, *Humphrey Clinker*. They're a little broad, but *she may read anything now she's married*, you know."

But whatever liberty may for the future be allowed

to the dramatist or to his hearers, I am sure that no play which came from any English author of repute during the years included in M. Filon's survey could work in any girl's mind so much mischief as must be done by the constant trickle of little cheap cockney indecencies and suggestions which make the staple of entertainment at some of our theatres. But, as I have said, it is only the serious dramatist who in the present state of public feeling is called to account for immoral teaching.

I have strayed far from my immediate subject. But if I have written anything that cannot be considered appropriate as a preface to M. Filon's book, I hope it may be accepted as a supplement. At the time M. Filon wrote, the English drama was a force in the land, and had the promise of a long and vigorous future. Now those who were leading it stand, for the moment, defeated and discredited before their countrymen. But the movement is not killed. It is only scotched. The English drama will always have immortal longings and aspirations, though we may not be chosen to satisfy them.

Meantime, one cannot help casting wistful eyes to France, and thinking in how different a manner we should have been received by the countrymen of M. Filon, with their alert dramatic instinct, their cultivated dramatic intelligence, their responsiveness to the best that the drama has to offer them. France would not have misunderstood us. France would not have treated us in the spirit of Bumble. France would not have mistaken the men who were sweating to put a little life into her national drama, for a set of gloomy corrupters of youth. France would not have bound and gagged us and handed us over to the Philistines.

M. Filon has done us a kindness in bringing us for a moment before the eyes of Europe. He will have done us a far greater kindness if the English edition of

his book helps our own countrymen to form a juster opinion of those, who in the face of recent discouragement and misrepresentation, who, with many faults and blunders and deficiencies, have yet struggled to make the English drama a real living art, an intellectual product worthy of a great nation.

XIV

THE DRAMA IN THE ENGLISH PROVINCES IN 1900

From an article in "The Nineteenth Century" for March, 1901, by the kind permission of the late Sir James Knowles.

WHEN I became a provincial playgoer in 1870 the old circuit system had been dead for nearly a generation, and the stock company system was already dying. A very vivid and charming little miniature sketch of the old circuit actor is to be found in M. Filon's account of the English stage reprinted from the "Revue des Deux Mondes." But the strolling player perished before my playgoing days, or lingered only in the provincial stock company that was itself on its last legs. It was, of course, the railway that did to death both the old circuit actor and the settled provincial stock company.

I was able to watch the transition in the provinces from the stock company located for a season in one town and playing a repertory, to our present system of travelling companies moving from town to town and playing only one of the recent London successes. For a year or two almost every evening saw me regularly in the pit of the theatre of a Northern manufacturing town. The company was probably an average stock company of the time. There was the "leading" man; the "leading juvenile" man; the "heavy" man; the "low" comedian; the "old" man; the "first utility" man; the "general utility" man; and the "light comedy" man. This latter performer did also in his own single person body forth those types of male humanity whose character,

bearing, and form, clearly proclaimed them to be "walking gentlemen"—that is, when suitably attired in woefully-fitting lavender trousers, and a pair of split and dirty lemon kid gloves.

To turn to the other sex, there were the "leading lady"; the "heavy" lady (whose appearance provoked a sorry obvious jest); the "old woman"; the "general utility" lady; the "chambermaid"; and the "walking" lady, whose style, manner, and dress, displayed a large imaginative caprice, and were a fitting pendant to those of the "walking gentleman"; though indeed they were not readily recognizable as appropriate to any "lady" who ever "walked" our own or any other land. It will thus be seen that the company contained representatives of those twelve or fourteen everlasting types into which, according to the still lingering delightful classification of our English theatre, our Fashioner is always moulding and baking his creatures, as if he were some decrepit old potter whose invention had decayed.

There was not, so far as I can remember, a "singing chambermaid." Heyday! Here's a tempting theme!

Hist! Hist! Thou ravishing visitant to this sad earth, thou twinkling shaft of sunlight shot across our northern gloom, would that troops and troops of thy saucy sisterhood skipped everywhere amongst us, and everywhere infected and inflamed our stubborn bleak commercialism till it danced and sang in rampant unison with thee, even to the scandalous verge of making England merry again, thou impudent charmer! Alas, what boots it, songstress, to sing thy praises? Thou art not any past or present actuality of English life. Thou art not to be found carolling on thy errands along the corridors of any company hotel. Thou art a phantom of the footlights and theatrical advertisements, from whence thou art shabbily vanishing, or hast shabbily vanished. Adieu, figment!

In addition to representatives of those twelve or

fourteen well-defined types, into which, according to theatrical phraseology, it has pleased Providence to cast humanity, there were two leading supers who were occasionally augmented for special productions. These two supers were always present as the main body and trusty henchmen of Richard's or Macbeth's army, or the chief guests in a modern drawing-room. One of them was very sallow, with thick black hair and a low forehead. His only expression was a determined savage scowl, which might indeed have been of some happy service on those occasions when the business of the scene naturally required an onlooker to regard it with that expression of countenance. But unfortunately for his usefulness even at such rare moments, his scowl was always directed at the audience, and I never detected in him the least approach to any interest in the performance. The other leading super was a large sandy man, with an amiable moon-face and a pronounced squint. So far as the shifting and impenetrable vagaries of his glance allowed one to guess what was passing in his mind, he appeared to take a fatherly benevolent, but somewhat contemptuous, interest in what was being enacted before him. He gave one the notion that his mind was a storehouse of futile irrelevancies, and his peculiar expression, added to his wonderful (apparent) power of focussing his vision simultaneously on the middle occupant of the gallery and on the bald spot in the conductor's coiffure beneath him, conspired harmoniously with his fellow-super's scowl to convict every scene in which they appeared of being a candid and whimsical imposture. In saying this I do not imply that their efforts achieved a different result from that usually achieved by supers; or even by exalted leading actors and actresses in London; but only that their respective methods of obtaining that result were noticeably original and unique.

To sum up the company, it was fairly capable in

domestic and legitimate drama. The leading performers "knew their business," and while I cannot say that I ever saw a great performance, I certainly saw many sound and respectable ones. The piece was changed two or three times a week, but the repertory remained the same to some extent during the season. *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *Leah*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Porter's Knot*, and other and more bloodthirsty melodramas constantly changed places with *The Daughter of the Regiment*, *A Hundred Thousand Pounds* and *Hamlet*. Occasionally leading performers like Toole and Sothern came and brought a new piece for trial, filling in the smaller parts from the local company. A very unequal and slovenly performance except in the leading parts, was generally the result.

The scenery and furniture were atrociously bad. A shabby orange-coloured chamber nightly challenged every law of architecture, decoration, and archæology; brazenly pretending to be a mid-Victorian parlour to-night, while last evening it had claimed to be Joseph Surface's library, and the night before it had ambitiously posed as Portia's palace. A kitchen scene played much the same pranks with architectural possibility and human credulity; while the Forest of Arden might perhaps have passed muster as the ramparts of Elsinore if it had not been unblushingly announced the week before as the "Exterior of a Cottage at Clapham;" at the same time showing a background of wonderful rocky sea ravine such as no Rosalind nor any maiden of South London has ever gazed upon.

No performance of any striking merit stands out in my provincial remembrances apart from the occasional visits of London performers. Already the stock company was doomed. Travelling companies playing the Robertson comedies of *Caste*, *School*, and *Ours*, had lately visited the leading towns, and it soon became evident that this was to be the coming form of organization for the drama in the provinces. From that time to

this the provincial stock companies have dwindled in numbers, importance, and ability, as the travelling companies have correspondingly increased in the same respects till they have virtually taken possession of the whole field. Many tears are continually shed over the decease of the stock provincial company; many cries are continually raised for its resurrection. There are good reasons for lamenting it; there are good reasons for wishing its restoration—if that were possible. But in considering the future of the drama in the provinces, the wiser plan is plainly to recognize that the old form of provincial stock company is dead. Killing Time has glared upon it, and it lies a veritable corpse before our eyes.

A very interesting correspondence concerning the provincial drama appeared last summer in the pages of the weekly newspaper, *The Clarion*. Mr. William Archer, Mr. Courtneidge (the manager of the two leading Manchester theatres), Mr. Thompson (the critic of *The Clarion*), Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and many others, continued the discussion for several weeks. Much truth was raked out, many complaints were made, some suggestions were started, and nothing was done.

The general situation was well described by Mr. Courtneidge in a very able letter, showing great knowledge of the subject, great enthusiasm for the drama, and a willingness to join in any practical scheme for its betterment. To put the matter as briefly as possible, the main facts are as follows:—

The first thing to note in the situation is the great and continued increase of country people who constantly visit London. Not only our leading families, not only the professional classes, but almost every tradesman goes up to London every year, for periods varying from some days to some months. This means that English playgoing has become largely centralized in London. Our long runs in town are largely supported by the constant flux of country visitors. Country people do

most of their playgoing in London, and tend to have their tastes and judgments formed by London standards. The plays that obtain sufficient success in London to be sent into the country have been already seen in their best presentment by most of the regular provincial playgoers. And unless a play has some feature of absorbing interest, it is rarely visited in the country by those who have already seen it in London to better advantage, or what they suppose to be better advantage.

The large towns, eight or ten in number, are visited nearly every year by some of the leading London managers—Irring, Tree, Alexander, Hare, the Kendals, the Cyril Maudes, and others. These leading managers take their London productions and their London performers—at any rate in the leading parts. There is generally a little reduction in the salary lists, a little weakening of the London cast, but the performance is not markedly inferior to the one given in town.

These visits of the leading actors are almost always crowded, and bring a very substantial profit to both London and local manager. And these few weeks, at most some six or eight in the autumn, are almost the only profitable ones in the whole year for our leading country managers—apart from pantomime and musical comedy. There is perhaps a chance successful week or so of a London success, a popular melodrama, or an extraordinary farce like *Charley's Aunt*.

It is not worth while to quibble about words, but these visits of London managers can hardly be counted as the provincial drama. When the whole cast and scenery of the Lyceum or Her Majesty's are taken to the Theatre Royal, Manchester, it is virtually London playgoing that is being done in Manchester.

The annual pantomime, extending from Christmas to some time in February according to the degree in which it hits local taste, is the country manager's sheet-anchor. It is generally a formless perversion of a fairy tale with the latest popular music-hall songs introduced; it often

gives great scope to singers, dancers, and variety performers to show cleverness in their different ways. It is lavishly and generously mounted, but in some crying form of tawdry bad taste. It certainly amuses the hard-worked populations of our large towns, and is usually as free from any outrageous impropriety as it is from any pretence to intellectual effort, either in the writing or acting. It cannot be considered as drama; it has no relation to drama, and its structure seems to grow more formless each year. But without the profits brought in by this annual pantomime more than half our provincial theatres would have to close in bankruptcy. The local pantomimes are largely attended by all classes of playgoers, even those who rarely go into the local theatre at other times.

After the few weeks of the London managers, and the pantomimes, those devoted to musical comedy are the most profitable. Very large sums are taken by musical comedies, which seem to succeed in proportion as they make no demands upon the intelligence or emotions of the spectator. The musical comedies are supported by the same artists who play in the pantomimes, and very often the same songs and catchwords and antics are introduced. The whole entertainment is of the same order as the local pantomime, appeals to the same tastes, and meets the same widespread demand for entertainment outside the drama. It affords clever singers and dancers the means of displaying their art, and gives opportunities for much buffoonery to the comedians. But, again, it cannot be said to have any connection with the drama. It is entertainment pure and simple. It succeeds because it lacks the first essential quality of drama—that of painting humanity. It exists not to show life, but to make the spectators forget life.

Outside the upper, professional, and middle classes who constantly visit London, there are vast crowds of the lower classes who remain all the year in the large

towns and who have a rough uncultivated love for the drama. Melodrama, therefore, still fitfully flourishes in the provinces, chiefly in the second or third class theatres. Considerable fortunes have been made, I believe, by pieces which have never been heard of in London; while some old London successes still make profitable appeals to simple country audiences in the pit and gallery. But melodrama is apparently dead in London; and there is no very hopeful outlook for it in the provinces.

There is still perhaps a considerable future for gospel drama in the provinces. Many years ago I pointed out that a huge fortune was waiting for anyone who would teach the British public to save their souls by the help of religious drama, instead of by religious stories. I did not misjudge my countrymen. The general level of intelligence and education amongst our populace; their confused training in religion and their comparative lack of training in the drama, render vast numbers of them easy and defenceless victims to what may be called the *Have-you-found-Jesus* type of play—a treacly mixture of salvation and theatrical enjoyment. And clergymen, who are sometimes judges of religion, but are rarely judges of the drama, seem always ready to recommend to their flocks, and to advertise as a masterpiece any pretentious blend of religious and dramatic bathos.

Now art is never more nobly employed and more plenarily inspired than when she is working in the service of religion. And religion is never more gracefully employed than when she is patronizing art. A religious play is the highest type of play that can be written. I mean a play written from the inside, in an age of faith, by an inspired believer, who is also an artist. Such a play is *Everyman*. Such a play, however, could scarcely be written to-day in England. The whole current of modern thought almost forbids a dramatist of serious pretensions to deal sincerely with religious matters and persons from any other than a critical

detached, outside point of view. He may indeed deal with them in perfect sympathy, or allow them to paint themselves from their own point of view ; but this will not make a religious play, but only a play that looks out upon religion.

Now the *Have-you-found-Jesus* type of play does pose as a religious play, and does pretend to offer rapid and easy salvation on the spot to playgoers ; and it wins popularity and success on that account. It is vicious because it fosters the idea that moral and spiritual reformation can be cheaply and suddenly won by excitement in a theatre, instead of by a severe struggle amongst the duties and temptations of life.

The *Have-you-found-Jesus* type of play has no hope of gaining any great or lasting success with London playgoers. But in the provinces for a long time to come there will doubtless be rich veins of superstition and ignorance and fear waiting to be worked by any playwright who cares to grub in that soil. While America seems to offer a boundlessly fertile soil for the production of the *Have-you-found-Jesus* type of play. But whether this is due to the fact that American playgoers feel themselves to be more in need of salvation than English playgoers ; or whether the hurry of national life in America makes them more responsive to shortcut methods of obtaining salvation, I cannot say. It is a country for quick lunches.

The way to test the real value of any *Have-you-found-Jesus* play is to read it carefully after having seen it successfully performed on the stage.

Apart from the forms of theatrical entertainment which I have hastily run through, there are one or two companies playing a repertory of Shakespeare and the old comedies. Mr. Benson has made gallant and successful efforts for Shakespeare and the old comedies in all our provincial towns ; and Mr. Ben Greet has also deservedly gained a high reputation in a like enterprise. Both have offered a valuable training school for recruits,

and both have given performers of marked ability to the London stage.

Lastly, there are the companies that are organized and drilled in London to go out and play exclusively one of the latest successes produced at such London theatres as Wyndham's, the St. James's, the Haymarket, the Garrick, and the Criterion. They meet with varied success. A piece that wins a great London success is almost sure to have some vogue, and to make some money in the provinces. But, as a rule, unless a piece is a great success in London, it will almost certainly lose money in the provinces. For a piece of this kind needs finished acting for its adequate representation, and this under the present circumstances of our stage it is almost impossible to get in the provinces. As soon as an actor obtains any reputation he tries to get a London engagement, and will not go into the provinces except under necessity.

I have now given a hasty bird's-eye view of the drama in the English provinces. I have purposely omitted the leading factor in the whole situation. The chief thing to take into account is the recent erection everywhere of huge music-halls, which have gained popularity and pecuniary success as the theatres have declined. Many of the performers at the music-halls are those who appear in pantomime and musical comedies; and while the more popular entertainments at the theatres have gradually become more and more like the entertainments at a music-hall, the entertainments at the music-hall have included short sketches, plays, and duologues, and in this respect have made approaches towards the drama.

Leaving out this dominant factor of the situation, which I shall deal with by-and-by, we may proceed to sum up the drama's gains and losses in the English provinces during the past generation.

We have almost lost the art of representing our great national masterpieces. The absence of schools of

training and practice has left our actors with a slovenly amateurish elocution, and a want of method and sustained power to grapple with great parts in such a way as to make them interesting or even credible to an audience. A generation or two ago, many of our provincial companies could have given at short notice a better *all-round* representation of most of Shakespeare's plays than could be possibly obtained to-day, with all our London performers to choose from. Correlatively, our provincial audiences have lost all care for their local theatre as an institution of their own, all pride in their favourite local performers; and I believe (though I should be glad to find myself refuted), nearly all enthusiasm for Shakespeare and a high level of poetic acting have evaporated. So much for the poetic drama in the provinces.

On turning to the drama of modern English life, I think we may, on the whole, claim to have made a distinct advance all round. It must be borne in mind that to-day there are, and can be, only two leading branches of English drama—our great poetic drama, and the serious, and so far as may be realistic, comedy or drama of modern life. By "serious" I do not mean "dull"—I use the word as opposed to burlesque, and all irrational and nondescript forms of theatrical entertainment. There are, of course, large delightful realms of farce and fantasy and burlesque which may well furnish genuine examples of dramatic art; but farce, burlesque, and fantasy can only flourish as auxiliary and supplementary forms; they can never be the body of a national drama.

These two main branches of modern and poetic drama are distinct arts. They do not make the same demands on the performer; and it is rare, almost impossible in England, to find an actor or an actress who excels, or who is even passably capable in both. In France, where the actor's training is more thorough and comprehensive, many of the leading performers are equally at home in poetic and modern drama.

To return. If in the provinces we have had a very heavy loss approaching to bankruptcy in the poetic drama, I think we can claim a modest and growing profit in many items on the modern side. It is very small and precarious, no doubt, but I believe there is a distinct gain.

To begin with the acting. Doubtless we cannot count so many good performers in scenes of rough pathos and broad comedy, but as the future advance of our drama does not lie in those directions, this is no great loss. We have many more, and many better actors who can interpret scenes that need subtlety and refinement; parts that need exact and definite characterization; who can deliver ordinary modern dialogue with some naturalness and point, and whose general behaviour and manner of speaking in a drawing-room are not modelled on those of the old Adelphi guests.

In general cultivation and intelligence, in manners and bearing, our present race of young actors is out of all measure superior to that of last generation. All duly qualified students of human stupidity will surely pronounce that the stupidity of the old actor, the actor who "knows his business" and knows nothing else, is the most exasperating and malignant form of the perennial malady of our race. A young Englishman fresh from Oxford or Cambridge is much pleasanter and more ductile material for an author and stage manager to handle than the old actor of last generation. I think the ensemble of a provincial performance by what is called the No. 1 Company of a London comedy success would place in a very unfavourable light any representation of a modern drama or comedy by a provincial stock company of the last generation, could they be simultaneously compared.

With regard to mounting and *mise-en-scène*, we may claim an immense improvement over the productions

of last generation. In place of the ludicrously inappropriate scenery I have described, and which had to do duty for all the various productions of the season, our best travelling companies take their own scenery with them from town to town. And this scenery is in most cases a copy of the London production, made specially strong to withstand the wear and tear. Again, in the matter of costume, the dresses are usually copies of the London production. In modern comedies the ladies' dresses for the No. 1 companies are often made to fit the performers by the same fashionable dressmakers who made the original dresses. The wardrobe of a provincial theatre a generation ago was a mere storehouse of dirty and tawdry incongruities that were equally ready at all times to misfit all plays and performers, and to assist the scenery in quaintly confounding chronology and destroying illusion. The mechanical appliances in all leading provincial theatres have also been wonderfully developed, multiplied, and improved during the same time. On all these counts we score considerable gains.

It is true that the supply of competent actors and actresses for the provincial companies is still lamentably deficient. This is accounted for by the unwillingness of performers of any repute to leave London, and by the absence of any opportunity of practice and training for our recruits. If I am able to claim that our leading provincial companies give a tolerable representation of a modern comedy, it is not because many of the performers know how to act, but because most of them are simply playing themselves. Our modern English drama is realistic and individualistic, not classic and declamatory. Now, granted a good original performance of a play in London, and a crowd of untrained raw provincial performers, the task is to pick out of these hundreds of aspirants just those who have some little experience and natural capacity; and whose figure, manner, and general bearing most nearly agree with

the respective characters of the play. We then set them to watch the London performance and, so far as they can, to reproduce it. By this means we can generally secure a tolerable, if amateurish, representation for the country tour. And I think that in this way the provincial public is better served to-day with regard to modern plays than it was served under the old stock company system.

But it is a bad system for the actor: it keeps him wooden and inflexible; it deadens his sense, his enthusiasm, and his talent; it leaves him an amateur to the end of his days. I recently heard of a young man who took lessons for a year in elocution; he then obtained a small part in a provincial company. This he played for another year; he then shifted and obtained another small part, which I believe he is still playing. And this is typical of what is taking place everywhere amongst all our young actors and actresses. This is our present system for teaching one of the subtlest, most intellectual, and most difficult of arts. Compare the case I have mentioned with the average case of the young actor who entered the profession thirty or forty years ago, and constantly had to play a dozen different parts a week.

This, then, is the crying evil to be remedied. Both Mr. Courtneidge as manager, and Mr. Thompson as critic, struck their finger on the place in calling out for some school of training and practice for our young generation of actors. They did indeed also lament the present dearth of new plays, and the absence of any school of practice for young playwrights. But this is a far wider question, and is not merely a provincial matter. It is indeed the most vital question that can be raised in respect of our national drama; but it would be out of place to deal with it here.

But the absence of a school training for actors and actresses may perhaps be considered as having a direct concern with the provincial drama, since, until the

present generation, the provinces have always been the recognized training-ground for London.

Mr. Courtneidge, who has the double advantage of having been an actor trained in the old school, and of being a manager in the present school, formulates the outline of a scheme for a stock company to visit the leading towns, and to be established and supported by our leading provincial managers. If such an organization could be formed, I think it might be of great service and influence, as indeed must be any well-trained company performing intellectual plays. He proposes that this stock company should stay several weeks in each of the large towns, and play a repertory of old and new plays. I think there might be room for such a company, and if it were well trained and directed, it could, I think, be made to pay. But the scheme seems to be attended with many difficulties, and I question whether it would altogether meet our crying demand—that is, for a school of constant practice *before the public* for our young untrained actors.

I do not see how Mr. Courtneidge's proposal can be made to fit in with present conditions and tendencies. What place in such a scheme would be taken by the last new play by a recognized dramatist? For it is always the latest London success that governs the situation in the provinces so far as plays are concerned.

If the provincial playgoing public could be induced to come and see a modern comedy with half the zest and in half the numbers that they flock to a pantomime or a musical comedy, we might, by raising salaries, induce better London actors to come into the provinces in the smaller parts, and thus give an all-round performance that should be in no wise inferior to the London one. I wish provincial playgoers could be brought to believe that a country performance by carefully selected performers may be as well worth seeing as the more highly favoured London production.

Something, perhaps, may be done to form a school of public practice for young actors, by fostering the growth of under-companies in connection with some of our theatres, both in the provinces and in London.

I venture to give a rough outline of what seems to me a feasible and comparatively inexpensive plan.¹ It should, however, be first tried in London, and if found successful there, it could be adapted to our large towns. There are always a large number of aspirants to the stage of both sexes. A competent stage manager and teacher of elocution should be appointed and well paid by the leading London managers and authors to examine the qualifications of all who care to present themselves for stage tuition. Many aspirants would be weeded out in the earlier trials while the doubtful ones would be held in suspense for future probation. Rehearsals of standard poetic and modern plays should be relentlessly and vigorously pursued with these raw amateurs, either at some theatre not temporarily occupied, or by turns at our regular theatres. One of the more lowly rented theatres should be taken, as it could, for a comparatively small sum, and bi-weekly or tri-weekly morning performances should be given *with a free entrance to the public to the cheaper parts*. Low prices might be charged for admission to the better parts in order to help towards the expenses. But the tuition should be free, and there should, of course, be no salary to the actor. From the great number of aspirants presenting themselves, we might hope to get a fairly high level of raw talent. Aspirants should be allowed two or three trials before they were finally dismissed as incapable, or accepted as students. Being accepted, they should then be called upon to sign an undertaking to undergo a certain course of study, and in return for their training,

¹ In the former paper, "The English National Theatre," I have suggested that this scheme, or some modification of it, should be adopted by the promoters of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in their present circumstances (see p. 132).

the institution would take a percentage of their salary during the first years of their engagement on the regular stage. This latter clause should be made very stringent, and all London and country managers would be expected to co-operate with the institution in working it so that the scheme might tend to become self-supporting. The payments of the public to the better places in the house would also contribute to the same end. But we could not hope that the school would defray its expenses for many years to come. It would have to be cordially and unreservedly supported by our leading London managers, actors, and authors. Our leading actors might be asked to attend rehearsals, and occasionally to give lessons. The managers might be asked to lend appropriate scenery, and authors might be asked to place some of their older and better known plays at the disposal of the institution. There is no doubt that the initial expenses would be considerable, and that there must be a constant outlay for some years to come. But I think we should all find ourselves amply repaid in time by the number of fresh recruits that would thus be brought to our aid. The *matinées* should be given on days that do not interfere with the ordinary theatre *matinée*. The scheme should be made thoroughly known, so that public interest might be roused and sustained in it. And doubtless, if it could once be started, and a fair level of efficiency attained, a good audience might be expected on each occasion. The ordinary public should be admitted free, or at quite nominal prices, due care being taken to exclude constant loafers. Of course our recruits would have to live while they were learning their business, but so does a young man who gives four or five years of his life to learn the far easier craft of carpentry. And the fact that they were associated with the school ought to give them the first call on managers for the parts of supernumeraries and small parts at our regular theatres.

The scheme could not be put on its legs without the

cordial co-operation of all our managers, and without a handsome subscription to start with. But the sum to be provided would be a mere nothing compared with that required to endow a national theatre; while, if the scheme should be found to work, the more ambitious undertaking might be grafted upon it. If my plan should be thought worth consideration, it might at first be taken in hand and hammered into shape by a small committee of experts. These should appoint a general manager to work incessantly and exclusively to carry out the details of the scheme. Rehearsals should be conducted with the driving insistence of a drill-sergeant. There could be no hope of carrying the thing further towards success without a resolute, capable, and clear-sighted organizer. And where is such a man to be found? Provided we could lay hands on him and make his position permanent, profitable, and honourable, I think some good might come of my suggestion. But, I throw it out with great diffidence, and only in the absence of any alternative scheme for meeting our most crying need—a training school for young actors where they can constantly appear *before the public*.

The scheme is, I think, more suitable to London than the provinces, but it could be tried in each of our larger towns. What a chance for a millionaire-philanthropist to provide the necessary expenses, either in London, or in his native Manchester or Birmingham!

But millionaire-philanthropists are shy in coming to the aid of the drama, and prefer to make selfish investments for eternity in another class of spiritual security. Yet I know of no way in which a wealthy man could better serve his fellow-Englishmen and win a lasting renown for himself, than by helping to raise this fine and beautiful art, which, however disabled and disorganized it may be to-day, is yet the prime glory of England in her glorious prime, and is not so atrophied and supine but that it may revive to add another glory to a greater England.

We must not at present expect any aid from municipalities as a body, but perhaps some day it may dawn even upon town councillors that to encourage this most human, civilizing, and in the highest sense educational art, should be as much the business and the ambition of an elected citizen as to lay down drains and build gas-works. Meantime, perhaps, provincial mayors may be entreated to give what encouragement they can to the art of the drama as separate from popular amusement.

Finally we are brought round again to the central fact which meets us and blocks the way in every argument and discussion about the English drama. Take up what side of the subject we may, approach it from any point of view, we are quickly brought face to face with this main truth, that in England the art of the drama only exists as the parasite and hanger-on of popular amusement. The form of theatrical entertainment most fashionable and most successful in England to-day is utterly opposed to the primary object of dramatic art—that is, to represent life. This is not to condemn it; it is only to classify it. Looking at the dreary lives of our millions of toilers, and the more dreary lives of our millions of suburban residents, who would wish to deprive them of a bright, harmless, careless evening hour? Who would be so churlish? Who would be so foolish? And nothing can be more gratifying than the marked improvement that has everywhere taken place in the music-hall entertainments, and to which I readily and gladly testify.

But the mischief is that English drama is mainly judged by the test of instant popular amusement, and of course rarely and hardly survives that test. Popular amusement everywhere escapes condemnation and ensures good-will because it frankly pretends only to amuse. The drama is liable to condemnation from both sides; either because it does not instantly and thoughtlessly amuse, which perhaps it did not set out to do; or because, pretending to be a work of art, it stoops to try

and amuse. And between these upper and nether millstones it is ground to death. The remedy is to separate English drama from popular amusement, and to ensure that each shall be judged by its respective and appropriate standards. Does this sound like an invitation to playgoers to come and be bored? It is not that. Look, again, at the population of our great cities—let any Londoner take a journey to any suburb and survey the land and its inhabitants—what fitting punishment should be meted out to the man who with superfluous malice sets out to plaster that dullness with a duller dullness, and daub that drabness with a dower dower? Who would be so churlish? Who would be so foolish?

No, this is not an invitation to English playgoers to make their theatres places of boredom. It is an invitation to them to make them places of rational and cultivated delight.

XV

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF THE DRAMA IN THE ENGLISH PROVINCES

September, 1912.

THE drama in the English provinces has undergone some notable changes in the twelve years that have passed since the preceding article was written. The regular theatres have suffered badly from the competition of the music halls. Many of them seem to have lost all hold on their public and to have barely survived; others have been cleaned and brightened and turned into music halls. The current London successes are still sent into the provinces, and are played by companies organized and rehearsed in London. But the period has been one of huge prosperity for music halls, which have gradually asserted their right to include in their programme plays and scenes from plays of whatever length and quality may attract the public. The old senseless restrictions and barriers are everywhere being broken down, and both in London and the provinces the music halls and theatres are being merged into each other. In all the large towns a considerable part of the programme in every music hall is set apart for some form of drama. As was foreseen a noticeable and steady improvement in the quality of the dramatic fare in music halls has been the result.

But the music halls in their turn are beginning to suffer from the competition of moving picture and cinematograph theatres which offer a sensational and

ephemeral form of drama to the masses. The result is that the music halls have found it to their profit to curtail the variety items in their entertainment, and to give a larger and larger space in their programme to drama. In many houses an entire play now forms the staple of the evening's fare, with a mere dash of one or two variety turns thrown in. While at some music halls the variety items have been altogether ousted and a play takes up the whole bill. This practice seems to be spreading, and the result of removing the irritating and stupid restrictions has been to turn many music halls into theatres pure and simple. And doubtless this is to the advantage of the drama.

It is to be noted that the music halls in the provinces and London suburbs give their programme twice nightly, one audience being admitted at seven and dismissed at nine to make room for the later visitors, who stay till eleven. The present state of things may be regarded as transitional, but whatever developments take place are likely to tend to some slight improvement in the taste of the crowd, and to an increased proportion of drama in the programme. It is not perhaps too much to hope that the enormous sums spent on public education since 1870 may at length begin to show some small result in the higher quality of the amusement demanded by the populace.

But the brightest sign of a renaissance of the drama in the English provinces is the formation of dramatic societies in the large towns, and the organization of repertory companies such as Miss Horniman's at Manchester. If such companies can be successfully organized in our large centres of population a genuine revival of the drama in the English provinces may be looked for. Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, Belfast and other large towns seem to be on the eve of such a revival. In each of these towns a body of devoted and intelligent playgoers have enrolled themselves for the study and promotion

of the modern intellectual drama. And in each of them a movement is afoot for the support of a repertory theatre. Such a movement will lead naturally to the ultimate establishment of municipal theatres in our large towns. It is to this end that lovers of the drama in the provinces may be entreated to bend their energies and aims. Let our young enthusiasts of the drama in every large town stir up a ferment of discussion and agitation for the establishment of a municipal theatre. Doubtless a stiff fight will have to be maintained for many a long year, but I am persuaded that there are forces at work in our national life which will at last cause our city fathers to recognize that it is disgraceful for large cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and the rest to lag behind small continental towns in the wise encouragement of wise amusement for the people. Again it must be urged that scarcely anything can be of greater concern to the masses than the quality of the entertainment which absorbs their evening hours.

It is noticeable in companies like Miss Horniman's and the Irish players that the quality of the acting always seems to be superlatively good. Now it is unquestionable that by constantly playing together, actors learn to give and take, and to help each other. Half the effect of any single performance in any play is due to the fit and nice responses the actor gets from his brother actors. Constant association enables actors to play up to each other, and like good bridge players to put tricks into their partners' hands. In a repertory company the actors learn each others' play, and it is to each member's interest to serve his fellow in certain situations, in order that he himself may be served in other situations. And further, it is to each member's interest that the organization should score as a whole. When an actor is only occasionally engaged for the run of a play he is naturally tempted to force his part into unfair prominence, and to play for himself, seeing that

unless he manages somehow to score in this one part it may be long before he gets another engagement. It is from these considerations that the acting in repertory companies always seems to attain a very high level. Each individual actor gets infinitely more and better chances of showing what he can do.

It is likely that we shall see many and constant attempts to establish repertory companies in our large towns. And they will succeed in so far as they can get new and promising plays to work upon. A word of caution from a warm sympathizer with the movement may be spoken to its promoters. A play does not necessarily become intellectual, because it is laboriously and conscientiously dull. Nor is it necessarily true to life, because it lacks imagination, passion, and beauty; nor necessarily sincere, because it is flagrantly shocking; nor necessarily moral, because it flouts the ten commandments; nor necessarily profound, because it lacks common-sense; nor necessarily well constructed, because it has only one scene for the entire play; nor necessarily natural, because it is badly constructed; nor necessarily a work of art, because it is quite natural and true to life.

This latter is a hard saying in these days. Ruskin most unjustly likened George Eliot's characters to "the sweepings out of a Pentonville omnibus." It is good to be natural; it is good to paint men and women as they are, and to make them talk and act like ordinary human beings. But it is not good to photograph commonplace people in their most commonplace aspects, and to report their commonplace sayings and doings.

Though doubtless in a democratic age, the "sweepings out of a Pentonville omnibus" do honestly conceive themselves to be of some importance in the scheme of things. And so they are. They are of immense importance to themselves, and to the sociologist. They are of still greater importance to the politician, for they all have votes; or very soon they all will have votes.

But why should novelists and playwrights take them out of their omnibus and put them into books and plays? They are in their fit place in their omnibus; there rest they, like Wordsworth's "party in a parlour," if not "all silent," yet assuredly "all damned." And thus cheerfully fulfilling their destiny and the vast designs of Providence, let them be left in their omnibus, till some Dickens comes along and lifts them out of it into the riotous chariots of his humour and fancy, and transfigures them, and clothes their mortal parts with immortality? For ever let them abide in their omnibus, for ever creaking up Pentonville hill; while for ever on the Grecian urn abides the bold lover, for ever pursuing a bride who can never fade, under trees that can never be bare.

XVI

LITERARY CRITICS AND THE DRAMA

From the *Nineteenth Century Review* for April, 1903, by the kind permission of the late Sir James Knowles.

IN the last December number of this Review Mr. Oswald Crawfurd ventured again into that perennial bog in English literature, the modern English drama. Into the Slough of Despond, Bunyan tells us, had been thrown "twenty thousand cartloads of wholesome instructions" and yet the way was nowise improved. During the last twenty-five years how many thousands of "cartloads of wholesome instructions" have been poured down upon the English drama, and yet the footing seems as shaky as ever. Till at last one begins to dread that the English drama is as perverse and incorrigible as one's own private character; a domain where, as all we good Christians know, enormous strivings after perfection are scantily rewarded with the most meagre, oblique, and miserable results; where vast efforts must be unceasingly expended to obtain the poor satisfaction of not having backslided much behind our former state.

Those who watched the English drama for the few years preceding 1894 must have seen that it was moved by a new impulse, that it was diligently setting about to render a truthful portrait of English life, or at least of certain aspects and currents of English life. Let anyone compare the published English plays of the years 1890-94 with those of the preceding generation, with the faded insipidities of Robertson, the lifeless

punning witticisms of H. J. Byron, the emasculated adaptations from the French which held our theatres from 1860 to 1880—let anyone make this comparison, and I do not think he will charge me with taking too sanguine a view of the situation when in the autumn of 1894 I announced *The Renascence of the English Drama*.

The ink in my pen had scarcely dried when a series of letters appeared in the newspapers assailing the leaders of the English dramatic movement as subverters of English morality, and clamouring that the national drama should again be raised to its proper level of a Sunday School tale, and to the chaste dignity of Madame Tussaud's. We all know what happens in our blissful realm when instincts which would make a lasting reputation for an inspector of nuisances proclaim themselves the supreme magistrates in art, and scourge their possessor to run amuck in æsthetics. Very little was seen or heard of the English drama for the next two or three years. The English playgoer, having taken two or three shuddering peeps at humanity in Ibsen's and his imitators' mirrors, declared the likeness to be a horrible libel and ran affrighted away.

There followed two or three years of gay revellings in cape and sword, mere holiday burlesques with phantom fighting men for heroes, with no relation to life, with no pretence to human portraiture. When our cape and sword junketings had somewhat abated, an era of pretty sentimentality began to dawn; always a useful era for fathers of families; very deservedly successful, very deservedly praised. For no one who has our national well-being at heart can but wish that many, nay, let us say that most of the entertainments at our theatres shall be such as young girls can visit without any feeling of discomfort or alarm; providing that the dramatist is not thereby shut out from dealing with those darker and deeper issues of life which are freely discussed and probed in the Bible, in Shakespeare, in the Greek tragedies, and indeed in all great literature;

providing that the dramatist is not defamed as a malefactor when he declines to put himself on the level of an illustrator of children's fairy tales. We are here brought naturally into the one path where all discussion on the English drama inevitably leads—that is, to the distinction between popular entertainment and the art of the drama. Only so far as this distinction is recognized and enforced can we set out to have a national English drama.

To sum up the last ten dramatic years in one sentence, we may say that we have passed from the raptures of ardent morbidity in 1894 to the graces of soppy sentimentality in 1903; we have exchanged a dose of drastic purgative for a stick of barley-sugar. Now neither black draught nor barley-sugar can long furnish the staple diet of man; neither ardent morbidity nor soppy sentimentality can give forth a great spirit to possess and inform a national drama. For both ardent morbidity and soppy sentimentality are alike far removed from that large and wise sanity; that keen wide view of men and women; that clean delight in the healthy savour of humankind, which are surely a distinctive mark of the English spirit at its best; which are equally a distinctive mark of the greatest English literature; and which we may confidently prophesy will be equally a distinctive mark of our English drama—if we ever get one.

Now it seemed to me in reading Mr. Oswald Crawford's article of last December that he had really seized upon the supreme points at issue when he asked, "Why is English literature so estranged from the English drama? Why does such fierce and unnatural hatred exist between parent and child? Is there any way of bringing them together again?"

Mr. Oswald Crawford glances across to France and sees there a national drama not only akin, but indeed largely identical with contemporary national literature. Ask at the smallest railway bookstall in France for *L'Aiglon* or *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and you will be handed

the two hundred thousandth copy. Inquire in England for a copy of some play upon whose representation the English-speaking public has perhaps expended some hundreds of thousands of pounds, and you will find that in print it can scarcely toddle into a poor second edition. Here I imagine that nobody will be so obliging as to give me the chance of retorting, "Oh no! The mere absence of literature from a modern English play is no reason why it should not sell in its thousands. Look at our bookstalls!"

No, the truth is that play-reading is a habit, not very difficult to acquire when once the shorthand of it is mastered. It must be allowed that the technicalities of stage directions and descriptions of the scene are tiresome and confusing to the inexperienced reader. Rather than perplex the reader, it is better to omit them as far as possible, and trust to the dramatist's one and only weapon—his bare dialogue. It has been suggested that readers might be won for English plays if the stage directions were expanded in a literary way, the dialogue being imbedded in full explanatory narration and description.¹ The experiment is worth trying, and might lead to interesting developments. I incline, however, to drop stage directions altogether in a printed play. What more do we want when we open *Macbeth* than "A blasted heath. Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches"?

I repeat that it is chiefly the mere habit of reading plays that needs to be acquired.

A constant and general habit of reading plays will have an important incidental result. In France, as Mr. Oswald Crawford perceives, the drama is recognized as something distinct from the theatre. It has a power and life of its own. In England the drama and

¹ This suggestion has since been put into practice, and in some modern plays has been developed to a ridiculous extent. It indicates that the playwright cannot manage the tools of his own craft, but is obliged to borrow the tools of the novelist (November, 1912).

the theatre are alike mashed up in the common pig-trough of popular entertainment. The dramatist does not count in the least with the great body of playgoers, except as a sort of journeyman behind the scenes, who in some vague and undefined way hands to the actor his conjuring implements. A play does not exist in England apart from its representation. If, from one of a thousand causes, that representation is faulty or ill-directed, instantly the play dies and is no more seen. And the one law that governs the successful production of a play—namely, that the creation of the dramatist and the embodiment of the actor must be equal and coincident, that the greater the creation the greater and more embracing must be the embodiment (or some forcible-feeble fiasco will be the evident result)—this law is not even suspected by English playgoers. Now Mr. Oswald Crawford has perceived that the habit of reading and studying plays, as is the custom in France, would surely give a great spurt to a national English drama. For having clearly seen and urged this and other kindred points, I think English playwrights are considerably in debt to him. He is, I think, quite wide of the mark when he says: "At present the writing of plays is in England a close profession"; and again, "In France and Germany, especially in France, there is no privileged enclosure, barred to the outsider, for the professional playwright."

Nothing can be further from the truth than to suppose that playwriting in England is "a close profession," that there is any "privileged enclosure, barred to the outsider."

What are the facts of the case? Some few months ago Mr. George Alexander gave the Playgoers' Club a chance of discovering and displaying the quantity and the quality of outside dramatic talent that was vainly knocking at managers' doors. What was the result? Again, Mr. Oswald Crawford must remember that almost every man of letters of the present and past generation, from Tennyson and Browning downwards, has written plays, and has offered them to managers. Mr.

Oswald Crawford says that the reforms indicated in his paper have for their object the breaking down of "barriers that now keep away from the writing of plays the men most competent to write good ones." In reply to this it must be urged that, whatever barriers there are, they cannot be said to have kept away from the writing of plays any one single person, competent or incompetent. Mr. Oswald Crawford is surely the only man of letters in England who can boast, or confess, or deplore that he has never offered a play to a manager. One scarcely knows whether to envy, to congratulate, to laud and belaud, or to sympathize with a writer in so astonishingly unique a position. No, it cannot be too strongly asserted or too widely known that there is no "dramatic ring," no "close profession," no "privileged enclosure, barred to outsiders."

Further, the behaviour of literature itself offers the surest testimony on this point. Nothing can be more amusing or more significant than the manner in which literary gentlemen of quite respectable standing (such, for instance, as Mr. W. E. Henley) treat the modern English drama; their alternations of contempt and patronage; their sudden changes from the sincerest form of flattery to the liveliest exhibitions of disappointment and jealousy and anger—all this should surely offer some key to the situation. No, the barriers between literature and the drama are not such as Mr. Oswald Crawford supposes. "Barriers" of some kind there are, since we are all agreed that modern English literature is scarcely represented in our theatres; that it is largely despised by our audiences; that the majority of the performances given in our West-end theatres are not merely indifferent to literature, but are instinct with blatant derision of it; that these are the theatres which are the most successful with the public, which meet on all sides with the utmost goodwill and goodfellowship; where the entertainment is always sure of a long run, though it is as far removed from anything that could be

called literature as a modern villa is from Salisbury Cathedral.

These, then, are the facts. Where does the fault lie? What are the real barriers? Now it must be granted that in no future time is it probable that the drama proper will again be able to compete with popular entertainment on its own ground. The stars in their courses are not with us in the present stage of civilization. Never again will an English dramatist draw such popular audiences as the Elizabethan dramatist could gather round him from the sweepings of the streets. One of our present mischiefs is that the English dramatist is bidden to try and hit two widely distant bull's-eyes with one shot; he is commanded by his public and the press to meet opposing sets of conditions, to minister to widely opposing tastes. And seeing that the drama must always be a popular art—a popular art, not a popular entertainment—seeing that a half-empty theatre of itself makes a bad play and bad acting, the dramatist can only live at all by drawing a certain number of crowded paying audiences around him. If he shoots wide, he most likely hits neither of the bull's-eyes.

I think, however, it may be claimed that there is in this great nation of London, with its constant stream of visitors, an audience sufficiently numerous to support an intellectual English drama. I think there is a large body of public opinion waiting to be organized; a large vague feeling of expectancy waiting to be informed and directed; a general wish that the subject of a national drama should be explored and experimented upon. I have already thanked Mr. Oswald Crawford for having struck his finger on the central spot, the want of any definite understanding between our literature and drama.

He goes on to make practical suggestions for a future drama. And here I think an examination of his proposals will give us an insight into the whole matter, will show us exactly what the real "barriers" are and

where they lie. Mr. Crawford perceives that modern audiences are more and more grudging of the time that they will give to sit out a performance. The lateness of the dinner hour has something to do with this; the hurry of modern life, the value of time, are also to be taken into account. But neither of these is the governing factor.

What, then, is the governing factor? Audiences will sit with no sign of impatience from eight till twelve or half-past to see Sarah Bernhardt, or Réjane, or Salvini, or a Wagnerian opera. They will, under quite special conditions, sit nearly all day to see the Passion Play. To put it briefly, audiences will sit as long as they can see great acting in interesting plays. But no matter what great or interesting play has been written, audiences will not sit to hear it for one moment unless it is being acted in a great and interesting manner. Then the whole of the credit is due to the actor, after all? Not at all; just his fair share, which is usually about half of his one character, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less, but usually I suppose about a half. And this brings us to the unfolding of the law I have previously glanced at, the law whose existence is not even suspected by English playgoers, viz.: "It is not what the playwright has written or intended that audiences see, but only that part of it which is vitalized by the actor, vitalized in accord with the playwright's design, vitalized in such a way as not to unbalance or distort or obliterate that design."

We begin to see the first great pitfall that eternally awaits the playwright.

Ascend some mountain when the clouds are gathering round its summit; look down through the constantly shifting gaps; see little islands of green down below; little ribbons of road leading nowhere; great cities being wholly blotted out, or only guessed at from the fragments of spires and pinnacles that float unbuttressed on the vapour; mist, mist, mist, and uncertain drifting

everywhere. Try to form some idea of the landscape, some coherent picture of what lies before you—then try to piece together the picture that the playwright has graven when it is blurred by bad acting and bad stage management.

The main thing to note with regard to the length of a play is that audiences will sit for four hours providing that the acting is vital enough to keep them in their seats. And I think that herein lies one superior attraction of the French theatre which Mr. Oswald Crawford has failed to mention, in that our neighbours have a far greater number of great natural actors and actresses than our English stage can show, while in point of general average training and technique we dare say nothing, and in saying nothing we say all.

Therefore underlying the whole situation is this fact, that in the absence of a reading public, fine or great plays can only be produced in direct proportion and relation to the number of fine and great and trained actors who are available to interpret them. I hope I shall not be represented or misrepresented as complaining of the actors and actresses who have interpreted my own plays. I do indeed owe a debt of gratitude to those who have so loyally, and so patiently, and in some instances so magnificently introduced my work to the English public. Let me hasten to record this immense debt of general gratitude; let me at any time be called upon to make specific acknowledgment in any of those numberless instances where splendid stage talents have been ungrudgingly employed with the happiest results for myself.

This must not lead us away from the broad fact that we have nothing like so many or such highly trained actors and actresses as can be found in France; and that the future success, and indeed to a large extent the future writing, of high-class plays depends chiefly upon our obtaining an adequate supply of highly trained actors and actresses.

I saw a modern play at the Français. It held me throughout the evening and gave me a constant illusion of being in the best French society, and of overseeing a wonderfully interesting story. I afterwards saw the same piece at a West-end London theatre, the characters and scenes remaining French. It was played by some well-known actors, not indeed of the first rank, but yet quite efficient according to our notions. The whole thing was dull, false, forcible-feeble, vulgar, and impossible from beginning to end. Now all that difference lay in the acting and stage management. Yet it was impossible to blame the actors; they did not give what could be detected, even by experts, as bad or lifeless performances. It was only the comparison with what I had seen at the Français that enabled me to say that the play in English was really ruined by the acting. If it had been the first performance of a comparable play of English life, the actors would have been praised for doing their best in what was obviously a hopeless piece, and the author would have been blamed. And nobody could have impugned this judgment, since nobody can be blamed for not seeing what is not there.

But it is not merely the lack of a large body of trained actors and actresses with great methods that stunts our English drama. We have great actors and actresses among us, great artists too; nobody can more willingly offer more convincing testimony on that point than myself.

But how is it that so many of these, and those in the highest places, are never seen in English pieces by recognized English authors? For instance, how is it that so great and incomparable an actress as Mrs. Kendal is scarcely ever seen in London and never in any play that is worth consideration except on the ground of providing her with an effective part? This is a question upon which English playgoers have a right to press for enlightenment. A generation or two

ago it was the custom of the leading actor to buy a piece outright, generally an adaptation from the French; he was then at liberty to put it on the stage with such alterations as his judgment, or policy, or vanity might dictate. Now it is very plain that the rise of a national English drama must put an end to transactions of this kind. It is not a question of whether in many cases the actor's judgment and instincts may not be surer than the author's; very often, and especially in what is immediately effective with an audience, the actor is able to offer most valuable suggestions. And, speaking for myself, I make it an invariable rule in this and other matters to accept advice when it coincides with my own opinion.

But very often the necessities and advantages and well-being of the play do not in the least coincide with the necessities and advantages and well-being of the leading actor's reputation. And this fact to a large extent, to an extent that is daily growing larger, has separated the best English plays from their best possible representation, perhaps from the only adequate representation of them. English playgoers are herein the losers, and it is they who must finally adjudge the dispute. But it is quite clear that if we are to have an English drama, it can only be settled one way; it is not a matter of fees, or of self-importance, or of precedence; it is a matter where a just pride in one's art will always spring up so long as there is any life in the art at all.

But further, not only is the training of our actors and actresses deficient and slovenly, but the state of affairs is every day tending to grow worse. Mr. Benson's and Mr. Ben Greet's are now the only repertory companies left on the English stage. It is a remarkable fact that many of the most striking recent successes, both in modern and poetic drama, have been made by members of Mr. Benson's company—that is, by actors who have had the advantage of constant, hard, and varied training; who have not grown mannered and

careless and lazy in the comfortable and ignoble shelter of a long run.

From all this I hope it is apparent that a concurrent, if not a primary move in the production of good plays is the foundation of an academy, or training school or schools for actors, so that an adequate interpretation may be ensured. Otherwise good plays, even if written and produced, will merely fall dead and leave no seed.

I have elaborated this point because I am sure it should be our first practical step; all building of national theatres is for the moment out of the question. The first great practical move to be taken in dramatic reform is somehow and somewhere to provide constant training before the public for young actors or actresses. The first great ideal, never quite to be realized, but always to be upheld and impressed upon playgoers, is the separation of the art of the drama from popular entertainment.

I have left until now Mr. Oswald Crawford's suggestion as to the way of meeting the supposed demand of English audiences for shorter hours at the theatre. I have shown that this is largely rather a demand for more vital and continuous interest on the stage. But doubtless a shortening of the time, say from nine till eleven, is desired and would be welcomed by a large number of our playgoers. Mr. Crawford suggests that the first act of our plays should be omitted, and that in lieu of it the author should write a narrative prologue giving the substance in one literary speech.

It is just possible that this might be done successfully for once in a way, as a *tour de force*. But it is quite certain that nothing but a hybrid, infertile form of art could issue therefrom. If anyone wishes to write narrative poetry, let him do it; there is still a great field open. If anyone wishes to write drama, let him do it, or try to do it. But if the piece has to be shortened, let it be shortened according to the rules of its own art. Will Mr. Crawford forgive my telling him that no man

should think himself a dramatist until he can so condense and inform his dialogue that behind it is hidden and packed up a narrative of greater volume than the dialogue itself? I do not say that the main outline of the entire story may not often be given in half a dozen words; but I do say that whatever is essential for the audience to learn must by suggestion, by implication, by side-lights and contrivances, be given by the dramatist in dialogue which shall convey all necessary facts of history, all necessary facts of character, all relations of the persons in the play to one another and to the main theme—shall do all this in far fewer words than would be used by a story-teller in giving the same information in the third person. And therein lies the art of the playwright; therein lies his peculiar technique, which I affirm is more difficult to master to-day than the technique of painting, a technique which every man who hopes to be a painter will willingly give many years to learn.

So that whatever reduction it is advisable to make in the length of plays should be made within the rules of the art of playwriting—that is, by further compressing the story. What is perhaps the greatest story that was ever told on the stage, the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, is not sensibly longer in words than *Box and Cox*, and it contains far more story and action.

I think that English playwrights, guided by the loud entrances of late-comers in the stalls, are learning this necessary lesson of compression. In this connection let who will glance at the first act of *Tartuffe*, which is all exposition, and contains scarcely any action. But Mr. Oswald Crawford thinks that the practice of writing prologue would make us “literary.” At best it could only teach us to write narrative poetry, or narrative prose; and it is not these, but national drama, that the English nation lacks just at present. Thus it is plain Mr. Oswald Crawford’s reform would really draw off our forces from our own proper work.

There is one sentence in Mr. Crawford's article which illumines the whole matter. Mr. Crawford says : "Stagecraft is an art, and an important one, but literature is a far greater one, and only a great writer could write a great prologue." Just so, but only a much greater writer could write a great drama. And it is here a question of writing drama, wherein skill and practice in writing prologues will help us scarcely at all. True it is that literature is a far greater art than mere stagecraft ; but what we are seeking to produce is not mere stagecraft, but stagecraft that shall be also literature. Here I think Mr. Crawford in unconsciously opposing literature to stagecraft has disclosed the whole situation, has disclosed what and where are the real "barriers" between literature and our drama. For the benefit of English literary men who wish to write plays, and of English literary critics who wish to discuss them, these "barriers" may be conveniently pointed out.

English literature, then, can be seen on the present-day English stage under the following conditions only ;

(1) The writer must have some natural instinct for the stage, some inborn gift for the theatre.

(2) He must patiently learn the technique of the stage, a technique I believe to be far more difficult and exacting to-day than that of painting, which everyone will allow is not to be acquired without years of study and practice.

(3) His literature must inform and exhibit a strong, moving, universal story ; and must do this in a casual unsuspected way, as if the writer were unaware and unconcerned about it.

(4) His literature must be so broad and human that it can be instantly apprehended and digested by the boys in the gallery ; who will else begin to hoot him, and prevent his play from being heard at all.

(5) His literature must be so subtle and delicate that it will tickle the palates of literary critics in the stalls ; who will else proclaim him to be a vulgar mountebank

and impostor, practising the cheapest tricks of money-making.

(6) His literature must exactly fit the mouths, and persons, and manners, and training of the various members of the company who are to deliver it; or it may appear to the audience in some inconceivable guise or disguise of quaint imbecility.

(7) His literature (in a play of modern life) must be of that supreme quality which is constantly and naturally spoken by all classes of English men and women in everyday life; it must be obviously and frankly colloquial; or the writer will be instantly convicted of artificiality and unreality in a matter where everybody is an expert.

(8) His literature must be of that kind which will immediately bring at least eight hundred pounds a week to the box office, in addition to the costs of production; or his manager will be hastily advanced to the bankruptcy court.

These, then, are eight of the "barriers" between literature and the drama. And after this explanation I do not think it will be fair for literary men or literary critics to speak of a "close profession," a "dramatic ring," "a privileged enclosure, barred to the outsider, for the professional playwright."

At different times I have had through my hands manuscript plays of men whose names are eminent in literature, men of high dignity in the Church, men of the highest renown in science, and they have generally shown an entire ignorance of the conditions I have laid down above.

After this I hope we may beg that literature will cease to flout and despise the modern drama, and will try to understand what our difficulties are; how tough is the battle we are fighting with vulgarity, with theatricality, with the prevalent lust for senseless and sensual entertainment, with all the forces that are ranged on the side of sprawling licentiousness.

I take it for granted that it is desirable to have an English drama. How strange it would be if an English painter could by any possibility moot such a question about his art! Yet the drama is in itself far more searching, instant, and operative than painting; or indeed than any of the other arts; far more potent for intellectual ferment and life. Surely in any well-ordered community the drama should be the most alive of all the arts.

As Mr. Oswald Crawford has shown, in France the national drama is a live part of the national literature. That is because French literary men love and understand their drama; are jealous for it, instead of being jealous of it, as they are in England; jealous and ignorant of it, and fitfully contemptuous.

Now if the English desire to have a drama, the way to it is very plain; very plain and straightforward, though it must be owned it will be very difficult and hard of ascent. I have here indicated some of the difficulties, and I have pointed out what should be our first move—namely, to start a training school for our rising actors. I fear there can be no training school for playwrights; “therein the patient must minister to himself.” I hope, as I have leisure, to deal with other difficulties and misunderstandings as they may arise. My excuse for again vexing the public must be that some of the most important matters are in their essence quite different from what they appear to be; and can only be truly weighed and estimated when they are approached with a practical knowledge of the stage from within.

XVII

MR. BIRRELL AND PROFESSOR LOUNSBURY AS DRAMATIC CRITICS

September, 1912.

THE lively interest in the modern acted drama shown by American Universities, and by American men of letters, has led them to a clear understanding and a sound method of criticism of classic and poetic drama. Compare Mr. Augustine Birrell's estimate of Browning as a dramatist, in his "Selected Essays," with the estimate of Professor Lounsbury, of Yale, in "The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning" (Scribner, 1911). Both critics are devoted admirers of the poet, but Mr. Birrell, in a piece of special pleading, claims a high place for Browning as an actable dramatist, and affirms that he succeeded on the stage. This, as Professor Lounsbury has shown and as everybody knows who is acquainted with the English theatre, is a delusion of Browning's admirers, encouraged by Browning himself. Browning in the theatre has never had anything more than a *succes d'ennui*; and this can easily be won by any literary man who has a following; or, as is constantly seen, by any eccentric person who discovers some new way of boring people in the theatre. These laudatory verdicts of partisans are sooner or later, "rectified by the masses," to use Goethe's phrase.

"But when the crier cried, 'Oh, Yes,'
The people cried, 'Oh, No!'"

Mr. Birrell's criticism may be profitably read as a

standing illustration of the ever-recurring failure of men of letters to get in touch with the acted drama, or to understand its simplest laws. Professor Lounsbury's criticism may be read as a standing illustration of the rare success of a man of letters to get in touch with the acted drama, and to understand why and when a play is not a play. Professor Lounsbury incidentally shows (what is known to readers of our English *Times*) how enjoyable and stimulating dramatic criticism may be, when it is done by a man of letters who has studied its laws in the theatre.

By the way, a delightful piece of good reading is Dennis's criticism of Addison's *Cato*, quoted at length in Johnson's "Lives." Johnson, being an English man of letters, of course does not see the cogency and justness of Dennis's criticism, and in pronouncing judgment on *Cato* goes as far astray as Mr. Birrell himself. Mr. Birrell will doubtless be glad to be found astray in Johnson's company.

Dennis's humorous and merciless analysis of the absurdities in the actions and motives of the characters in *Cato* may be read alongside Professor Lounsbury's humorous but more kindly severe analysis of the absurdities in the actions and motives of the characters in *The Blot 't' the 'Scutcheon*.

¶ What is the very plain truth about Browning's position as a dramatist? Let Professor Lounsbury tell it in his own words.

For Browning's rank as a dramatist, "the most extravagant claims have been advanced, especially of late years. More than once we have been assured that he is the greatest of English dramatists since Shakespeare. . . . The truth is that so far from being a great dramatist second only to Shakespeare, Browning in the proper sense of the word is no dramatist at all. No great poet who has set out to write plays has failed more signally than he in mastering the technique of his art. None has shown so little comprehension of those

details of expression, construction and arrangement which unite to make a play successful on the stage. . . . His dramas throughout exhibit vital defects as acting plays. They lack organic unity and order, and what we may call inevitable development. What is further unsatisfactory in them is the utter inadequacy of their portrayal of human nature, and too frequently their unfaithfulness to it. But so far as the average playgoer is concerned, worse than anything else is their lack of sustained interest. . . . Above all, so far as regards representation, the impossibility of comprehending the conversation, and consequently of following the course of what little action there is, without effort which must be antagonizing in its intensity—this of itself will always make them failures on the stage. . . . It is no marvel, therefore, that Browning's plays did not succeed. They are often hard to follow in the closet; on the stage it is impossible to follow them. The truth is that his forte did not lie at all in the drama. It is in dramatic monologue alone that he achieved success. In that he has no superior in our literature. But the dramatic monologue is only allied to the drama; it is not the drama itself. . . . Without speaking of any other of its various failures to meet the requirements of stage representation, it excludes action entirely. But action is a cardinal distinction of the drama proper; it is essential to its very existence. Herein Browning failed completely. The characters in his plays are as a rule so much taken up with talking about everything in general, that they have hardly leisure left to do anything in particular. They discuss their feelings instead of being inspired by them; and in discussing them they forget the hearer who is waiting for something to happen. . . . His plays therefore are to be read and studied; they are not to be witnessed. Not one of them complies with the canons of effective stage representation. The born dramatist, like the orator, has his eye always upon the audience. In order to rank Browning in this class of writers, his

partisans have to invent a distinction between dramatic authors and playwrights which seems based on the theory that a genuine dramatic author cannot produce a play which an ordinary audience can endure. To mark a distinction between a great poet, and a great poet who is also a great playwright, nothing can be supplied more convincing than a comparison of *Luria* with *Othello*."

Later in the volume Professor Lounsbury enforces his general verdict by a dissection of the plots and characters of Browning's plays.

Everyone, except politicians, must regret that Mr. Birrell is now mainly busy with matters away from literature. But nobody can regret that he has deserted dramatic criticism ; unless indeed it might have led him to a better acquaintance with the actual theatre and with those laws of the drama which are valid always and everywhere. Why is it that English men of letters, even when they are not unsympathetic and contemptuous, go so wide of the mark when they speak and write of the drama? The question is of the first importance, because no worthy school of English drama can arise till it is not only supported by the playgoing public, but is also backed by the authority of literature. Even the "rectification by the masses," of which Goethe speaks, is mainly brought about by a gradual filtering through to them of such sound literary judgment as they can approve, and is equally endorsed by the common-sense of both literary men and playgoers. Therefore it is urgent that literature should look into the matter, and say the right and fruitful word for which the modern acted drama is waiting.

THE LICENSING AND CENSORSHIP
OF PLAYS

XVIII

"THE LICENSING CHAOS IN THEATRES AND MUSIC HALLS"

A lecture delivered to the National Sunday League, at the Alhambra Music Hall, on Sunday evening, February 27th, 1910. Chairman, Sir Herbert Tree.

THIS meeting reminds me of a meeting in the old St. James's Hall in the autumn of 1889, when I addressed the National Sunday League on behalf of the opening of the National Gallery and the National Museums on Sundays. I am to address you to-night on a kindred question; one that is, I believe, of even more importance; the evening amusements of the people of England. I want you to feel with me how very important it is that any attempt to raise the character and quality of those amusements should not be interfered with by any useless restrictions, akin to those restrictions which a few years ago shut the doors of our Museums and Picture Galleries on Sunday. I want you to feel that this is a question of the same kind, that it is quite related to that other question which the National Sunday League spent many years to settle on the only firm and reasonable basis. How was the opening of the Museums and Picture Galleries carried and established? By an appeal to common-sense and to fair play all round. There were many people in England who wished to go to church on Sundays; there were many other people who wished to go to a public-house; there were many other people who wished to see their National collection of pictures, and to hear fine music. There were many others who wished to do some two, or all three

of these perfectly reasonable things. Well, in the end, it was found that the people who wished to employ their Sunday leisure in these reasonable ways, could not be thwarted and restricted and denied without the risk of great and increasing disturbance. It suddenly occurred to the government that there was a very simple way out of the difficulty, and that was to allow those people who wanted to go to church to go there; those people who wanted to go to a public-house to go there; and those people who wanted to see our collection of pictures to see them. That was the only solution. It was the simple solution of common-sense and fair play all round. Well, now, let us again take common-sense and fair play all round as our guides, and apply them to the regulation of the people's amusements on their week-day evenings.

Inasmuch as theatres and music halls are places where intoxicating liquors are sold; inasmuch also as they are places where large crowds assemble, and there is danger of fire and crushing; inasmuch also as they are places where possibly indecent exhibitions may be held—for all these three reasons it is necessary that there should be a licence to regulate them, so that the Manager may be held responsible for anything taking place there which is indecent, or dangerous, or harmful to the general body of their frequenters. I say that there is no doubt that a licence—a set of regulations is necessary. We are all agreed upon that. But surely this licence ought to be framed with the idea, and in the intention of not stopping or thwarting any amusement that is not dangerous or harmful or indecent. Our two rules in framing this licence ought to be these: "Let any citizen who provides amusement for his fellow citizens have the right to give them whatever amusement he thinks they want, providing only that it is not dangerous, harmful or indecent. Let every citizen who wants such amusement have the right to go where it is provided." That seems to me to be the

only way in which a licence can be framed according to the very plain dictates of common-sense and fair play. Instead of licences being framed and issued in accordance with that very simple rule, we have at the present moment a bewildering and mischievous chaos of stupid restrictions. I will not attempt to describe that chaos to you, for I should only keep you here till to-morrow morning, and then I could not give you any clear idea of the endless and futile absurdities that cramp and thwart the Managers of Theatres and Music Halls, and prevent them from giving the average citizen the harmless or intellectual amusement that he is asking for. If I do not tax your brains beyond endurance I will instance a few of them.

The Stage Year Book shows that there are thirteen different ways of licensing Theatres and Music Halls in the United Kingdom.

1. A PATENT THEATRE.—The origin of this licence was that a number of citizens said to the authorities, "We have a very respectable company who wish to represent a very respectable play, and we should like the King to permit our theatre to have the Royal patent." The only remaining patent theatres in England are Covent Garden, Drury Lane, the Theatre Royal, Bath, and the Theatre Royal, Margate.
2. The Lord Chamberlain's licence for stage plays only, and for the sale of drink, but no smoking.
3. The London County Council licence for plays, but no drink.
4. The London County Council licence for plays and drink.
5. The London County Council licence for plays and drink and smoking.
6. The London County Council licence for variety entertainments, and smoking without drinks, and without plays of any kind.

7. The London County Council licence for variety entertainments and drinking and smoking.
8. In the Provinces there are similar licences issued by the local authorities with the occasional privilege of giving distinct kinds of performances in the same building.
9. DUBLIN.—The theatres are under the control of the Lord-Lieutenant.
10. The rest of Ireland is under the approval of the local magistrates.
11. THE ISLE OF MAN.—A licence is obtained from the House of Keys.
12. In Glasgow, the theatres are licensed with no sale of drink after ten. Judging from the national habits this seems to be a distinct encouragement to the audience to miss the earlier acts and to get drunk while they have time.
13. The Oxford and Cambridge Theatres are controlled by the University authorities.

In London the Court Theatre is the only West End house not under the Lord Chamberlain, because it happens to be outside a boundary line; therefore it has a licence from the London County Council.

A man may build a beautiful playhouse, such as the Scala, and under the Lord Chamberlain's licence he is helplessly restricted to stage plays; while a patent theatre like Covent Garden to the good and gain of the manager and of the public, may at any time be either a circus, or a playhouse, or an opera house, or a concert hall, or a variety house, or a dancing saloon. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play to the other theatres and music halls?

The Camden Theatre was opened as a theatre, and like most theatres in these bad days it didn't pay. So it was sold to a Music Hall Syndicate. They opened it with a variety performance. A common informer sought the parish constable of Camden Town, who is, it seems, the legal authority to institute proceedings.

But that venerable and potent functionary, the parish constable of Camden Town, could not be found. The case was, however, tried and the theatre closed. It was re-opened with a cinematograph and an electric piano. Down came the common informer again and said, "You are not licensed for music." The manager said an electric piano was not music; but this unanswerable plea did not serve. He was fined forty shillings, and was told he ought to be fined four hundred pounds, for providing harmless amusement for his fellow citizens. And again the theatre was closed. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

Hengler's Circus was able for some time to present many varied forms of entertainment; but the Princess's and Scala theatres, a few yards away, remain closed because they may only produce stage plays. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

A touring pantomime found it was legal to give their complete performance in a certain music hall—the following week in another music hall they had to cut it up into variety turns, to conform to that particular music hall licence. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

The Coliseum about four years ago held the Lord Chamberlain's licence, and therefore could not legally perform variety entertainments. The management therefore dished up all the music hall turns into some semblance of a play by supposing an Uncle Gregory to be giving a party; and Uncle Gregory had to invite each group of performers including the elephants to entertain the children. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

The Aldwych was forced to have a play written at five minutes' notice to cover and include the performance of a famous American band. The Scala, under the management of the Variety Artists' Federation, had to provide a play to introduce a succession of music-hall stars who, under this subterfuge, could

give their ordinary performance. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

The Marlborough Theatre, Holloway, can only produce stage plays, and must prohibit smoking. At the Crouch End Theatre, a short distance away, which happens to be outside the Lord Chamberlain's boundary, you may smoke and see any kind of entertainment, play or varieties. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

Now you know that it is quite illegal for music halls to produce any stage play of any length; but under the illegal agreement between theatre managers and music-hall proprietors—which was condoned by our Chairman—(I am grieved to point him out as a law-breaker) under this illegal agreement Oscar Wilde's "Florentine Tragedy" and Shakespearean scenes are performed at music halls. But theatres may not introduce songs or dances unless they are part of the play. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

A sketch recently seen in the music halls is now played at a West End theatre, and several one-act plays recently seen at West End theatres are now given at the Halls. Both performances are illegal. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

In a well-known seaside town the local entertainment provider at both theatre and music hall is a most important property owner and has no difficulty in presenting any form of amusement, thus establishing a profitable monopoly; whereas a stranger wanting to build a new place of amusement would probably experience great opposition. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

In Blackpool a circus, concert hall, theatre, dancing hall, restaurant, and general amusement building, are combined as at our Crystal Palace; in other towns the theatre is handicapped by being able to present only stage plays. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

In Harrogate the ratepayers have built their own concert hall and theatre, and voted themselves a free

licence to give any sort of programme; but the Opera House hard by may only give stage plays. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

Music-hall managers are everywhere giving performances of plays not exceeding thirty minutes, and not having more than six characters. These performances are illegal, and they are liable to prosecution if any common informer brings an action against them. They are, however, winked at by the authorities. But if any dramatic author produces a play lasting thirty-five minutes and with seven characters he would be prosecuted by the same authorities. Is that common-sense? Is that fair play?

On the other hand, if Sir Herbert Tree wished to give a high-class variety entertainment at His Majesty's—say an entertainment consisting of a troupe of five dancers, a song by a prima donna, a solo by a violinist, and a play of an hour in the middle—he would be liable to prosecution. Is that common-sense? Is it fair play? Is it anything but sheer, blind, wilful imbecility? Is it not putting handcuffs on artistic and intellectual amusement?

These are some of the features of this confusion worse confounded that prevails throughout the amusement world all over the country.

I want to know what you citizens of London would say if next Sunday morning, when you take a walk across Hyde Park, you found that the Authorities had stuck up barbed wire enclosures all across the main paths and thoroughfares, with policemen stationed at each of them to warn off any peaceable citizen who wanted to walk from the Marble Arch to the Serpentine?

“You can't go down that path. Take your wife and family the other way.”

Well, you take them another way round, and you find the same barbed wire across another path, and you find another policeman saying—

"You can't go along there. Come off that path."

And you say, "Why? It is a public path, is it not?"

"Come off that path!"

"Why?" you peaceably ask.

"Well, the authorities have rigged it up with barbed wire, and you cannot go across."

"But why have the authorities put up that barbed wire?" you ask. "What is the reason?"

"They haven't got any reason. They've put up the barbed wire. You come off!"

If that took place in Hyde Park, I think the citizens of London would very soon make short work of that barbed wire and those fences. But the result of our present systems of licensing amusement is quite as obstructive to the ordinary rights of the citizens. All across our evening hours of leisure—the only time when we may be said to live—all across these evening hours of leisure the English law has stuck the barbed wire of senseless and indefensible restrictions. If you ask the reason, there may, indeed, be some sort of a reason why the barbed wire fence was once put there, but there is no reason on earth why you should not pull it down, and use your own public way.

Many of these needless and indefensible restrictions have grown up from the fact that our music halls and theatres had an entirely different origin. Our English drama had its origin in the period of the Renascence, and came, as you know, from the old morality plays, and from the mummeries that grew round Church feasts and Church holidays. It is not certain at what date the Lord Chamberlain first began to exercise a censorship over stage plays, but the records of his office show that as early as 1628, the Lord Chamberlain, either personally, or through the Master of Revels, licensed theatres, and closed them, and exercised a general supervision over the work of the dramatist.

These powers sprang from the Royal prerogative,

but in 1737 the censorship became a statutory function of the Lord Chamberlain. Our great Henry Fielding had been writing political plays, and had put on the stage political personages. This became so offensive to Sir Robert Walpole that he brought in a law which constituted the Lord Chamberlain licenser of theatres within the city and liberties of Westminster, and wherever the Sovereign might reside. That law empowered the Lord Chamberlain to prohibit, at any time and anywhere in Great Britain, a performance of any play; and it imposed heavy penalties on those who should perform any play in an unlicensed theatre, or any prohibited play, or any new play without the sanction of the Lord Chamberlain, or of letters patent from the Crown. Ever since then our plays all over the country have been licensed and played according to the judgment, or mercy, or caprice of the Lord Chamberlain; according as he liked to open his eyes or to close them; according as he knows and cares, or does not know or care anything about the drama.

Now, the music-hall entertainment arose in quite a different way. Before 1751 there was no regulation of entertainments outside the theatre. To show how the regulations for our present London music halls arose, I cannot do better than quote to you the preamble to the Act of 1751, which was the date when they became subject to legal supervision. The preamble to that Act reads as follows:—

“AND WHEREAS the multitude of places of entertainment for the lower sort of people is another great cause of thefts and robberies, as they are thereby tempted to spend their small substance in riotous pleasures, and in consequence to put on unlawful methods of supplying their wants and renewing their pleasures; in order therefore to prevent the said temptation to thefts and robberies, and to correct as far as may be the habit of idleness, which has become too general over the whole kingdom, and is productive of much mischief and inconvenience, be it enacted ‘Any house, room, garden

or other place kept for public dancing, music or other public entertainment of the like kind in the city of London or Westminster, or within twenty miles thereof, without a licence, had for that purpose from the last preceding Michaelmas Quarter Sessions of the Peace to be holden for the county in which said house, room, garden or other place is situate, as signified under the hands and seals of four or more of the Justices there assembled, shall be deemed a disorderly house or place, and every person keeping such house, room, etc., without such licence as aforesaid shall forfeit the sum of £100 and be otherwise punishable as the law directs in the case of disorderly houses.'"

You will see from this, that until within the last generation there was a very definite line between the theatre and the music hall. There was a legal line of demarcation which gave the theatre the absolute right to the performance of stage plays. There was a further line of demarcation in the character of the entertainments given at music halls, which were generally of a rather low, disreputable, and sometimes indecent character. There was also a pretty general line of demarcation between the audiences who attended the theatre and the music hall respectively. So that until about a generation ago there was a reason for the separate licensing and the separate regulation of the theatre and the music hall.

Now, there is perhaps something to be said for the legal reservation of the theatre as the sole place where stage plays can be performed. The main argument against it is, that it is quite unworkable in our present circumstances and conditions. Gradually, during the last generation, the music halls have raised the character of their entertainments, and have drawn a more and more respectable class. During that time they have illegally more and more encroached on the rights and reservations of the theatre.

The improvement of the music-hall entertainment took place when music halls began the illicit performances of

sketches and little plays. I believe that improvement (a very surprising improvement when we remember what music halls were thirty years ago) is largely due to their performance of stage plays. You know that, at first, these sketches being illegal, were prosecuted, and the managers of the music halls were heavily fined. These prosecutions were instituted until it became very evident that it was impossible to prevent the performance of sketches in the music halls. If these prosecutions were continued, it is estimated that at the present time there would be 150,000 of them annually. The law-breaking has become so frequent and so respectable, that it is quite useless to continue proceedings against the law-breakers. Upon this point the recent report of the Censorship Committee contains these very significant words :

“The performance of sketches in music halls is a practice too firmly established to be uprooted, nor is there any reason why the public which frequents music halls should be deprived, by force of law, of the pleasure of witnessing whatever form of entertainment those who cater for their amusement are able to provide.

“We believe, and we are supported in this belief by the evidence given before us by many of those best qualified to speak in the interest of the serious drama that the competition of the variety stage is not likely, appreciably, to affect the well-being of those forms of British drama which are entitled to solicitude.”

Let us go back for a moment to our rule of common-sense and fair play. What do common-sense and fair play indicate as the only simple way of meeting our difficulties? It is the way indicated by the report of the Censorship Committee, namely, to abolish the present legal differentiation between the theatre and the music hall, and to allow each to present whatever form of entertainment it desires. I believe that whatever differences of opinion there may have been about other points, the Censorship Committee were unanimous in coming to the conclusion that there is no other

way out of the present entanglement. There is no other way of allowing each provider of entertainment to give to his various patrons the best that he can provide.

The Theatre Royal, Dublin, is licensed by the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and is allowed to present to the public whatever entertainment the manager may find advisable and profitable.

This common-sense arrangement has allowed him to give a dramatic season of high-class plays at a time of the year when his patrons want them. It has allowed him to give a variety entertainment when his patrons ask for a variety entertainment; it has allowed him to give a hippodrome entertainment in the summer, when that form of entertainment is most suitable to the weather and to the tastes of his patrons. The result of this common-sense arrangement has been that the drama has prospered in Dublin, the theatre has paid, and the manager has secured a handsome dividend for the shareholders.

I can only ask again, why this common-sense arrangement should not be in practice in every music hall and theatre in the kingdom.

I have confined myself to-night to the question of the one licence, because it would be very easy to pass a short Act of Parliament legalizing all stage plays in music halls, and legalizing all kinds of entertainments in theatres. Of course, the matter is complicated with the Censorship question. I have not touched on that to-night, but perhaps at some future time I may ask you to give me half an hour to explain to you what the Censorship of plays really means.

The question of the one licence is also deeply complicated with the question of Sunday recreation generally; that also is a matter which we cannot touch upon to-night. But seeing that it is involved with your own Sunday question, I will ask you not to rest until the licensing matter is settled in the only way that it can be settled in conformity with our rule of common-sense and

fair play all round. I ask you not to rest until every theatre and music hall in the kingdom has letters patent from you as playgoers to give and perform whatever entertainment the manager may choose and the audiences may wish to see ; the only restriction being that such entertainment shall not be indecent, or dangerous, or harmful to the general public.

XIX

THE CENSORSHIP MUDDLE AND A WAY OUT OF IT

A letter addressed to the Right Honourable Herbert Samuel, Chairman of the Committee to examine the working of the present Censorship of Plays (September, 1909).

SIR,

Upon the assembling of your Committee to inquire into the working of our present system of the Censorship of Plays, Mr. Herbert Thring, the secretary of the Society of Authors, acting, as I understood, upon a communication from you, asked me to attend upon the first Thursday of your sitting, to give evidence before you, and to prepare a copy of my evidence beforehand. I had, however, settled to leave town before that date, and I could not fall in with Mr. Thring's suggestion, without interrupting some important business arrangements I had made for the autumn. I was therefore obliged to decline the invitation for that date, thinking that, perhaps, a later opportunity of appearing before you might offer itself. However, I read in the papers that on Friday last you closed the inquiry so far as regards the taking of evidence. After the long and patient hearing your Committee has given to various interests and opinions, I am very loth to trespass further upon your time and convenience. But as the matter is of some moment both to the public and to dramatists, may I in the form of a letter which need not much interfere with your deliberations, or long delay them—may I, sir, with the greatest respect, bring before you and your

Committee certain considerations which seem to me of much importance in the final settlement of the matter ?

I am the more encouraged to do this, inasmuch as even a very casual review of the evidence you have taken, clarifies the whole atmosphere, and brings into startling prominence two or three salient landmarks which indicate the course that must surely be followed, sooner or later. May I, then, very deferentially call your attention to a most striking fact which has doubtless made its due impression on your Committee, the fact that while you have been giving your valuable time for the past two months to determine what is to be done with the Censor at such well-conducted theatres as His Majesty's, the St. James's, and the Haymarket—during all this time, every music hall and variety theatre in the United Kingdom, even to the lowest, has been acting uncensored plays without a single reproach, without so far as I am aware a single complaint having been made? According to different estimates four to six hundred of these plays are on an average enacted nightly in Great Britain. Many hundreds of new ones are enacted annually. During the past ten or fifteen years these plays and sketches at music-halls have been irresistibly gaining wider and wider vogue and countenance, with such solid public support as must soon end in their complete legalization. During that fifteen years many thousands of these little plays have been performed in all parts of the kingdom. How many complaints have been heard? How many summonses have been taken out on the ground of indecency or immorality? I have not heard of one. If any prosecutions have taken place, if any commotions have been stirred, they have been so rare and so insignificant that not a rumour of one has reached me. Doubtless many of these plays have been crude and illiterate and horribly vulgar, and doubtless some of them have slipped from indelicacy into indecency. But while frank indecency can be easily

dealt with, nobody proposes to censor (if you will pass a necessary verb) crudeness, illiteracy, indelicacy, and vulgarity. And if they are to be censored, surely we ought to begin with some of our West End theatres. For smirking vulgarities and veiled indecencies are not wholly absent from some of our censored West End theatres, and were to be found in an entertainment mentioned with approval by one of your witnesses. Further, when some years back a public man was the cause of a loud scandal, the various ditties sung at music halls, though they were broadly indelicate and terribly vulgar, made entirely for morality, seeing that they showed vice ridiculous with as unsparing a lash as Mr. Puff would have wielded in the problem play which he proposed to write in order to show housebreaking in an absurd light to burglars.

To sum up on this point—surely the fact that for all these years past, thousands of uncensored plays have been performed in all parts of this kingdom without, so far as one remembers, a single prosecution or even a single complaint on the score of immorality or indecency; that is to say, with less scandal and with less reproach than has attended the various performances of clergymen during the same period—surely this single fact furnishes by itself overwhelming proof that English playgoers and amusement seekers do not need a Censor to protect them from their dramatists, but that they are competent themselves to judge us and, when it is necessary, to condemn us.

You have taken the evidence of dramatists, court officials, journalists, critics, men of letters, and others more or less interested and self-interested in this question. But I noticed what seemed to me a very grave, but perhaps unavoidable omission from the numbers of those who came before you. Those who are mainly concerned were scarcely represented at all—I mean English playgoers. It would have been tiresome to hear a representation from each of the many classes

of theatre goers. But seeing that up to the present, English playgoers have not been heard at all before you, and seeing that they are the chief party in the proceedings, may I very respectfully present myself here on their behalf? And may I beg you, if it is not too late, to consider the evidence I have laid before you, summing up the experience of many millions of them for many years, and all of it conclusively testifying that they neither want nor need a Censor? There has naturally been much conflict and confusion in the opinions of your various witnesses; but here, at least, is a solid body of testimony speaking in the loudest, clearest voice the unanimous opinion of those who have the first right to be consulted. If that evidence is not convincing, then evidence is useless. The question will not be settled by evidence and reason, but confusion and prejudice and vested interests will be left to reign over it.

Another salient point that stands out from the mass of evidence gathered by your Committee is the very curious one that all the pleas for the retention of the Censor (so far as the matter is one of morality and not of business interest or political expediency)—all these pleas may be easily and logically developed into one unanswerable argument for the censorship of the Bible and Shakespeare, and for the excision and suppression of many of their most moving and characteristic passages and precepts. Now it may be advisable, it may even be necessary, to alter our intertwined national standards of religion, morality, and literature. That is a matter for thoughtful consideration. May I beg your Committee to note that all these pleas for the retention of the Censorship ought logically to be fastened to, must implicitly be fastened to, the conviction that an alteration of our national standards is a necessity? No modern serious English dramatist has claimed nearly so great a freedom as is found in almost every book of the Bible, and in every play of Shakespeare.

It may be that our revered national standards are all entirely wrong. Let us, then, haul them down, and overhaul them, and re-overhaul them, and if they are found to be unsuitable and misleading, let us adopt and hoist aloft national standards suitable to our age. But till that is done why harry us poor modern playwrights? Why persecute us petty offenders and let the arch criminals, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding, and Sterne, go uncensored, untried, and unhung?

It may be said that I am confusing the issue so often raised, and made so much of during your inquiry—the distinction between the word spoken and the deed acted in public on the one hand; and on the other hand, the word read and the deed described in a book. Sir William Gilbert, whom I salute with great courtesy, would retain the Censor because in a book the author may, without giving offence, say that Eliza undressed herself and took a bath; while on the stage the author may not direct Eliza to undress herself and take a bath without giving offence. Now it is possible that in a book the author might describe Eliza and her actions and methods while undressing herself and taking a bath at such length, and with such voluptuous or disgusting particulars and associations as to arouse in the reader the exact sensations that would be aroused in spectators by seeing the same actions on the stage. In that case author and publisher would be prosecuted by the common law of the land, and sent to prison, and the book would be destroyed. And there would then be a parallel between that author and publisher, and the author and manager who showed Eliza taking her bath on the stage. And these latter would equally be prosecuted by the common law of the land and sent to prison. Otherwise there is no point whatever in Sir William's comparison. It does not even exist. Besides, what manager proposes to show Eliza taking her bath? Until such depraved lunatics become common in English

management, there is not the least value or meaning in Sir William's illustration. We will very gratefully remember the many times Sir William has amused us with better jests, and gently affirm that the question of the Censorship is not to be settled by a jest, even if it were apt and relevant. But the distinction between the word spoken and acted on the stage and the word read in the library has already been argued before you. There was no difficulty in showing that it is an error to claim that a book dealing vividly with certain matters is comparatively harmless and ineffective, and that a play dealing in a kindred way with the same matters is harmful and polluting. The truth is, as any one can see who takes the trouble to examine the matter that the corrupt book is likely to be far more pernicious and operative than the corrupt play. We are all virtuous in public—sometimes we a little overdo it; and to show how very virtuous we are, we scream out before we are really hurt. Thus a play, by the very reason that it is performed in public, that it is more alive, instantly rouses us and challenges us, and if any one is shocked he instantly declares it, and wakes up all the latent virtue in his less sensitive neighbours. But a book works more slowly and subtly; it can be brooded over; there is much the same difference between a corrupt book and a corrupt play that there is between secret drinking and a carouse in a tavern. Both are bad, but the secret drinking is far the more harmful. Eliza taking her bath in a book and described in such a manner as to render Sir William Gilbert's comparison valid, is really a far more insidious baggage than Eliza taking her bath on the stage; while Eliza taking her bath before a company of art students and posing as Diana would probably not be harmful at all.

There is, then, some distinction to be drawn between words and actions spoken and performed on the stage, and the corresponding words and descriptions in a book; but the difference so far as morality goes is all in

favour of the outspoken word and action. And every argument advanced on this ground for the retention of the Censor is really an argument in favour of his abolition.

But, it may be asked, is there, then, no way of stopping the performance of obviously lewd and indecent plays? Yes, I shall come to it by-and-by. And what about the exhibition of indecent posturing and dancing? I shall come to that also by-and-by, and I shall show that effective measures taken to stop indecent dancing and posturing necessitate the abolition of the Censor.

Returning to the consideration of the salient features brought out by a review of the evidence given before your Committee, one is startled by the instances given of the confusions, caprices, anomalies, and futilities of the Censorship as it is shown in actual working. If we were to try to get one great permanent rule to govern our judgment in this matter, if an appointed Censor were to search for one sure principle to guide his decisions, it would be difficult to find a better, shorter, or more universal maxim than is contained in George Meredith's line (slightly paraphrased)—"It is deeply conceived—it cannot be immoral." With this rule in our minds, let us briefly glance at the recent decisions of the Censorship. I call them decisions of the Censorship, so as to dissociate the office from the man. What are the most notable plays and authors that have been refused a licence by the Censorship in recent years? They are as follows:—

"The Cenci," by Shelley.

"Ædipus Tyrannus," by Sophocles.

"Ghosts," by Ibsen.

"Monna Vanna," by Maeterlinck.

"Mrs. Warren's Profession," "The Showing up of Blanco Posnet," and "Press Notices," by Bernard Shaw.

"The three Daughters of M. Dupont," and "Maternité," by Brieux.

"Waste," by Granville Barker.

If the Censor had deliberately set out to prove that the Censorship is at once disastrous and absurd, could he have acted otherwise than to veto these plays? We will omit "Press Notices," which was probably designed by the author with the intent of showing how small a fly would catch so considerable a fish as the Censor. What rule or principle could have guided the Censor to refuse the licence to the other plays? If there were any rule at all, it could have been no other than this—"It is deeply conceived—it must be immoral." I will leave Bernard Shaw to the tender mercies of posterity, and Granville Barker will doubtless rest secure on the pedestal where Mr. William Archer has placed him. Brieux has a great reputation, and is an avowed moralist—indeed his fault is that he allows the moralist to run away with the dramatist. Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna" has, we learn from himself, been played 3000 times on the Continent. I saw it in New York, where it ran for some months, and made a deep impression without raising any offence. What happened in England? The Stage Society announced two performances. Most likely if the play had been licensed those two performances would have seen the end of it in the theatre, for its morality was not the wax-doll morality which delights English playgoers—in the theatre.

But the Censor vetoed it. A Maeterlinck Society was formed, and it was played six or eight times, that is, it was probably seen by four times the number of people who would have seen it if the Censor had licensed it. Therefore, moral or immoral, the net result of the Censor's action was that a scandal was caused, the Censor was defeated, and the play was performed to increased audiences. Much the same thing happened with "Ghosts," "Waste," "Blanco Posnet," and "Press Notices." Again a scandal was raised, again the Censor was defeated, again the plays were performed in spite of him.

"Ghosts" has been performed all over Europe, and

surely this tremendous and moving play can only have had a powerful and searching moral effect. The "Œdipus Tyrannus" is part of the education of our public school-boys. If I wish to see it on the stage the Censor forbids me. "It is deeply conceived—it must be immoral!"

Now of course, if any considerable body of Englishmen are arranging to marry their mothers, whether by design or accident, the thing must be stopped at once. But it is not a frequent occurrence in any class of English society. Throughout the course of my life I have not met with more than six men who were anxious to do it. Still, it is undoubtedly a highly dangerous, immoral, and I should imagine an uninteresting proceeding; and any man, whether Censor or no, who checks it, deserves our gratitude as a zealous and comprehensive moral sanitarian. Though, indeed, it may be asked whether a public representation of the troubles that befell Œdipus might not prove a wholesome deterrent to anyone who is contemplating the step. But, at any rate, we may render a welcome tribute to the presumable motives of the Censor. And we will cordially pay him the same sort of respect that we paid to the other zealous sanitarian who recently proposed to burn down the Mansion House because there was a persistent flea in one of the bedrooms. Fleas are noxious wildfowl, and must be circumvented and, if possible, destroyed. But whether burning down the Mansion House is the best way of rendering this service to the occupants of the building is a moot point; and it seems to have escaped the notice of both our zealous sanitarians that fleas are very agile. However, the motive that dictates their destruction is a good one. But unless the Censor has got wind that some appreciable number of Englishmen are organizing a plot to upset our domestic arrangements and traditions by accidentally marrying their mothers, why does he veto "Œdipus"? What other reason can he possibly have? Let us ask him for his guiding principle.

Of all the plays vetoed by the Censor, incomparably the greatest and loftiest two, from the standpoint of literature, are "Œdipus" and "The Cenci." It will be noticed that both these acknowledged masterpieces deal with incest, not because the dramatists are actuated by dirty motives; but because terror is one of the two necessary ingredients of tragedy. It is because Ibsen unflinchingly strikes terror, imaginative terror, that he is stepping up to join the great tragic writers. Will they not look a little askance at him? Will they not say, "Yes, here is your terror, rightly enough, but where is your pity? Did you leave it on earth where they need it so much?" "I never had much pity," Ibsen will be obliged to own. Then they will ask him, "Why do you come in this grubby tattered homespun? where are your gorgeous robes and sceptred pall?" and they will point out to him that tragedy should always come sweeping by in gorgeous robes and sceptred pall. But I think they'll let him in, for he has great qualities; flamebright imagination, blistering irony, massive fortitude, matchless sincerity.

"Œdipus" and "The Cenci" strike terror because they deal with incest. The Censor shivers, but not in legitimate response to a great tragedy; he shivers vicariously for all the good folk in Brixton. "If this sort of thing is to go on, if people begin by marrying their mothers, where will they end?" Let the Censor take cheer and carefully read Westermarck's "History of Human Marriage." There he will find that the author, after enormous, indeed incredible, research and thought, has wrung from a wilderness of facts and customs the law which prompts the sexual feelings and relationships of those who live together under the same roof. It seems to be a universal law; and it may reassure the Censor to know that under its constant operation there is not the least fear that his good sheep of Brixton will ever, even in hole-and-corner groups of twos and threes, plot together to destroy

English society by marrying their mothers. If, however, on further examination than it has already received from the wisest and greatest minds during two thousand five hundred years, "Œdipus Tyrannus" is found to be an immoral play, let it and Aristotle's Poetics be immediately withdrawn from the places where they must be most actively exercising their poisonous influence—the shelves and forms of our public schools.

Meanwhile it has scarcely been noted that all playgoers have a sure and instant remedy to hand against the evils that may attend the public representation of these plays. A lady came to Doctor Abernethy afflicted with a strange disease.

"Oh, Dr. Abernethy, whenever I hold my left arm straight above my head, I do feel such a pain!"

"Don't hold your left arm straight above your head, ma'am."

"Oh, Dr. Censor, whenever I go to see a play by Sophocles, I do feel such a pain!"

"Don't go to see a play by Sophocles, ma'am," the Censor ought to reply, "but I am going to license it."

Generally English playgoers are sensible enough to apply the unfailing remedy I have pointed out to them, and thus relieve their moral pain or biliousness. The worst of the Censor is that he will insist on dosing and massaging us healthy people who don't feel the pain. Suppose "Œdipus Tyrannus" had been licensed at His Majesty's. A few odd playgoers might have been offended, as a few odd playgoers are at every play. But English playgoers generally would have been given the chance of seeing a beautiful and tasteful production of one of the greatest tragedies. And it is to be feared Sir Herbert Tree would have lost money, as he has done over some of his most honourable productions, and as he is always prepared to do when he thinks he sees the chance of mounting a great play.

Sir Herbert Tree gave his evidence in a very broad-minded spirit, and while remaining quite loyal to his

brother managers, showed his evident personal sympathy with, and a desire to help those music-hall managers who wish lawfully to give a somewhat better class of entertainment than the law now allows them. Whatever reluctance he showed to declare himself in favour of this policy may, I think, be ascribed not to the artist or to the man, but to the exigencies of the present-day manager.

Let us pass on to the Censorship of "The Cenci." It will serve the better to bring the general situation before us, for it was vetoed by the late Censor, Mr. Pigott. It has been suggested that the present Censor, Mr. Redford, is unfitted for the office. He is allowed on all sides to be amiable, obliging, and accessible. He has probably filled the most thankless, most difficult, nay, most impossible post in the kingdom in as capable and efficient a manner and, on the whole, with as good a grace and with as little friction as any future Censor we are likely to get.

May I here point out to you, sir, that the good old ante-friction days, when wax-doll morality¹ seemed to be firmly established on the serious English stage, are gone for ever, and that whatever difficulties the present Censor has had to contend with, are small compared with those which any future occupant of the post is likely to be called upon to face. And may I beneficently strike wholesome terror into the heart of any intending

¹ The pleasing system of morality practised amongst wax dolls. It is every way superior to the morality which prevails in the actual world. It may be seen in full operation by gazing into any toy-shop window where dolls are exhibited, or by attending the performances at some of our theatres. But as a visit to the theatre costs time and money, a visit to the toy-shop window seems to be the more profitable pursuit. It has been credibly asserted that both classes of exhibition have been organized with the object, not of amusing children as might be supposed, but with the profoundly ironic intention of pointing out a perfect system of morality to Providence, who must be held wholly responsible for the deplorable fact that men and women are not wax dolls, and for all the embarrassing and distressing consequences both in our theatres and in real life.

candidate for the post by assuring him beforehand that he will find the situation a bed of thorns, well-nigh intolerable and untenable? And this, not from any wicked designs and devices of English dramatists, but from the mere situation itself, and from the march of circumstances which must get beyond his control, so far as we have a living English drama at all. Mr. Redford is probably an average occupant of the post, and probably represents fairly enough the average man's views in the theatre, and of the theatre. Because, curiously enough, men and women who have a wide cultured intelligence in dealing with the other arts, sink to the intellectual and moral level of children when they judge the theatre. And it is only of late years that other standards of judgment have begun to show themselves; and doubtless it will take many years for these wider views and judgments to prevail, and to become the views and judgments of the average man. Meantime I do not think Mr. Redford is conspicuously to blame for the present crisis. He is a fairly average Censor, and any one placed in his position will meet with greater difficulties; because he will meet with more conflicting views and aims and opinions, more tenaciously held, and more vigorously backed and enforced by the tendencies of the time.

Mr. Redford is then an average Censor. Mr. Pigott was more than this. He was an ideal man for Censor. A constant theatre-goer; a man of the world; a man of charming social manners; a welcome diner-out; a delightful, companionable man, as all of us who had the pleasure of his friendship can remember; a man of fine literary gifts and tastes; more than this, a very liberal-minded, advanced man, a friend of George Eliot and Herbert Spencer—such was the late Mr. Pigott. Surely here is the stamp of man for a Censor, if a Censor we are to have. Strangely enough, or not strangely at all, Mr. Pigott, who in private life was so broad and liberal and easy-going, became a different creature in his official

garb. He once told me that managers were mainly licentious in their tastes and aims; that actors were mainly licentious in their tastes and aims; that dramatic authors were mainly licentious in their tastes and aims; and that they were naturally so because licentiousness paid in the theatre. He did not discriminate between different kinds of managers, actors, and authors; or between the widely different kinds of what he called licentiousness; or again between the author and the man—he merely shepherded us all together as a licentious troop who had to be kept in order by his nod or whip. He did not recognize what is a most important thing for the holder of his office to note, that the same professional pride and honesty and ambition which often keep a clergyman upright, which often turn a naturally timid man into a brave soldier, are frequently also the main-spring of a dramatist's conduct and motives, and tend to become instinctive and habitual with him. How then did the easy, genial, broad, amiable, cultured Mr. Pigott of private life become the narrow, suspicious, illiberal Mr. Pigott the Censor? Why, for the reason that I have just given—his office did it! He had to censor somebody, or clearly his office was useless. He lived in the good old ante-friction days before these troubles began. But it is very questionable whether he would have been able to control them very much, if at all, better than Mr. Redford has done. He would have remained the creature of his office.

Let us carefully look into Mr. Pigott's veto upon "The Cenci" with its attendant circumstances, because it forms a perfect and typical example of the working of the Censorship. Here was a proposed performance of what, in respect of poetry, is perhaps the greatest English tragedy of the nineteenth century, by one of our greatest English poets. Here was its promoter and organizer, one of our finest and most thorough English scholars and Shakespearean students, our ever-green Doctor Furnivall. Here was an expectant

audience of highly cultured and intellectual English men and women, amongst them Robert Browning. Here was an accomplished scholar and actor, Mr. Herman Vezin, and other ambitious actors ready to give their free services. Here was Mr. Pigott, a lover of literature, with catholic literary tastes in private, and doubtless a warm admirer of Shelley. And here also was Mr. Pigott the Censor, obliged from the necessities of his office to ban and quash the proposed performance, which he must have known would be an honour to the English stage and to everybody concerned.

What happened? A scandal was caused, a society determined to do the play, the Censor was defeated, the performance took place, and *was* an honour to the English stage. When the curtain had fallen on *The Cenci* I had a short talk with Robert Browning. He was greatly delighted with the performance, and of course was wholly in sympathy with it, and with the play. And that is a typical example of how the English Censorship works, even under an ideal man for the post, like the late Mr. Pigott. That is what did happen twenty years ago, what happens more frequently to-day, and what will happen still more frequently in the future, whoever may be appointed as Censor. The very palpable fact is that the Censorship worked mischievously and was ridiculous when we had no English modern drama to speak of; it works more mischievously and is more ridiculous to-day as the English drama grows; it will work yet more mischievously, and grow more and more ridiculous and impossible in the future, if its continuance be attempted.

How many more examples do we need? Who after this will advocate the renewal of an office that has so constantly proved itself equally disastrous and absurd? If the Censorship were once dropped, who would start an agitation for its renewal?

Let us leave the plays and the authors that the Censorship has vetoed, and turn to those it has licensed.

We may not see Sophocles, and Shelley, and Ibsen on the English stage, but any cockney shopboy and any man about town, may go to a fashionable West End theatre and have their identical tastes gratified by hearing cheap doggrel about ladies' "nighties."

Let us search for the rule or principle that has guided the Censor in his acceptance of certain plays or rather entertainments. If he has any rule at all, does it not seem to run something like this: "It is basely conceived, it is cheaply conceived, it is ignobly conceived, it is begotten in the mood of a Bank Holiday roysterer—therefore it *must* be moral." I will not wrong the Censor by thinking him capable of formulating or applying such a rule. He has no rule. He cannot have any rule except the very simple, and in the long run the inevitable, rule of licensing whatever is likely to please any considerable body of playgoers. His best judgment, his best tastes, his best standards, as I have shown in the case of Mr. Pigott and Shelley, count for nothing. The Censor is there merely to license anything that any fairly large body of playgoers would choose for themselves without his interference.

Mr. Zangwill has made an admirable division of dramatists into three classes, whom he labels as "pioneers," "plain men," and "pornographers." Of course all the three classes more or less blend and shade into each other, but it is a good working division for our present purpose.

Now the very great majority of English dramatists are "plain men," who in their best moral moods cheerfully peck at drawing-room foibles and follies; and who in their worst lapses go no further than what we are bound in charity to interpret as a more or less innocent flirtation, stopping dead at anything that may be uncloaked and rebuked as actual guilt. Even Bernard Shaw's characters, daring rascal of a "pioneer" as he is, are apparently engaged chiefly in brave and witty and lawless talking. They don't seem to be very busy

in active wrongdoing. The "plain men" give their personages far greater opportunities for intrigue, which neither the Censor nor the audience is called upon to look into, and thereby and therefore to attach a definite meaning. But the "plain men" rarely commit an open offence against propriety either in plain word or deed. So much honour they may claim. And the "plain men," forming as they do by far the largest, most successful, and most prosperous group of our playwrights, are naturally followed by a body of corresponding "plain," simple playgoers, who form the vast majority of those who support the theatres where drama and comedy are played. We may congratulate ourselves upon possessing this group of "plain" playwrights, and this enormous majority of "plain," simple playgoers. What follows? Obviously the "plain men" can go their way in calm indifference whether there is a Censor or not. His existence gives them no uneasiness and no inconvenience; neither his retention nor his removal need cause them a moment's concern.

About the great bulk of English plays no question arises, or can arise, as to their fitness to be licensed. And having regard only to this pleasing and very important fact, Mr. Walkley was perhaps justified in saying that too much fuss is being made over this business. And so there is, except for its very numerous and weighty implications and complications.

It is the "pioneers" and the "pornographers" that are causing all this bother. We have seen how the Censorship deals with the "pioneers;" not from following his own judgment, taste, or conviction, but from the necessities of his office. We may count Sophocles amongst the "pioneers," as he may well be reckoned in respect of the present condition of things. We have also examined the relation of the Censorship to the "plain men." And we have found that for this most popular group of dramatists, it is quite unnecessary, and has no appreciable influence or bearing upon their plays.

Now let us see how the Censorship affects the "pornographers," and how it deals with them. There are very few "pornographers" writing for the London stage; indeed I do not know of a single man who can be pointed out as a professional pornographer. But though they are very few or none at all, yet they are very numerous and very active, and are great favourites with certain sections of playgoers. That is to say, many blatant, coarse, objectionable, and ribald "snippets" (shall we call them?) are constantly to be found popping up and running in and out of plays of a certain class. In many cases they are doubtless gags of the actors, and they often have to be excised or toned down by the manager. In this sense there are many hundreds of "pornographers" on the English stage. "Pornographers" is perhaps too harsh a term to apply to them. As I have already pointed out, not a single prosecution has been instituted in all these years, so far as I can recall for the moment. The actual pornography on the English stage is more or less veiled, and is not often of a markedly virulent type. Glaring immodesties, indelicacies and imbecilities, horrible detestable vulgarities are there, but not many examples of true, impure pornography. And these indelicacies and immodesties are sometimes found in an entertainment containing much that is graceful, charming, and delightful to the senses. Still there are these hundreds of more or less practised "pornographers" writing for, or rather speaking on, the English stage to-day. Not to be personal, let us call them tendencies rather than authors; and let us dub these tendencies "Mr. Slangwheezy," "Mr. Bawlrot," "Mr. Harry Chortler," "Mr. Chummy," "Mr. Smallfilth," "Mr. Charley Wrapitup," "Mr. Bandysmut," "Mr. Foule Pinchbeck," "Mr. Frothspew," "Mr. Ganderpest," "Mr. Cadjoy," "Mr. Whatho Rorty," "Mr. Drollfuddle"—I fear, sir, I am becoming too reminiscent of Homer, so I will merely add the names of three especial darlings of the English public,

“Mr. Cacklefun,” “Mr. Spinethriller,” and “Mr. Godly-Slime.”

How does the Censorship deal with the large group of dramatists I have just named? For the most part he does not deal with them at all, because many of them do not even pay him the compliment of showing him their text. While Sophocles and Shelley and Tolstoi and Ibsen and Maeterlinck and Shaw and Brioux are cuffed and gagged, and then fiercely scanned in every line and word before being either emasculated or banished, the authors I have named and their hundreds of *confrères* are in the greater number of instances not called upon even to offer their works to the Censor. And if they were, they could easily dodge away from him the next night.

Still the Censor does, of course, look through whatever skeleton framework serves for the main authors of the piece to embroider their purple patches upon. And of course he can at any moment place an absolute veto upon even the least immodesty, or vulgarity, or indelicacy. He could even use a continual spray of influence and admonition to check their most glaring faults and indiscretions. If we must have a Censor, surely here, at any rate, he could have found a wide and useful field for his talents—here he could have done good service all round—“instead of which” he must needs gag Sophocles! I do not, of course, know how far the Censor has been active behind the scenes in curtailing and restraining the veiled indecencies and indelicacies of the authors I have just named. Let us very plainly ask him to give us a list of his efforts in dealing with this all-important class. I am inclined to think that he has done next to nothing at all, and that we have their pure, uncorrupted, unadulterated text before us. But surely, sir, if we have a Censor at all, here is where he ought to be most active and vigilant; here is the task to which his energies should mainly be bent. Why has he done comparatively nothing?

Sir, he dare not!

The authors I have named are too dearly enshrined in the hearts of too large a body of playgoers to be interfered with. So they have to be left pretty much to have their own way.

Further, suppose the Censor had censored this group; suppose he had, so far as was in his power, been helpful to them in chastening and improving their text, there remains quite as large and operative a group of authors who are, and for ever will be, outside his control. Yet so far as morals are concerned this group exercises an enormous but quite intangible and elusive power and influence. Again I will not be personal, for that would merely bring rancour and ill-feeling into the discussion. And this I am most anxious to avoid. I heartily disclaim the faintest wish, unnecessarily to injure or disturb the reputation, the position, or the *amour propre* of any, even the smallest of my comrade authors, of the least considered of my comrade actors, of the meanest person who has his standing in the theatre and his living to get there.

But if this business is to be set straight, plain and piercing words must be used. Again, then, that nobody may be personally offended, we will look upon this second group of authors not as men to be identified, but as actions and tendencies to be reprovèd. And that there may be no possible mistaking what these tendencies are, and no doubt about their meaning and direction we will dub them, "Mr. Slysmirk," "Mr. Bluewink," "Mr. Leerit," "Miss Tottie Kickit," "Mr. Wriggleit," "Mr. Coughit," "Miss Trixie Nudgit," "Mr. Apegrin," "Mr. Snigger," "Mr. Lewdtrick," "Mr. Broadspank," "Mr. Dirty-chuckle," "Mr. Poserump," and so on. All the members of both groups will be found active here and there at all times of the year, but they are in full employment in the lower-class pantomimes. Well, they are our brothers; for there remains in all of us some strain of their blood. Only by the grace of God some of us are

not obliged to get our living by their means. But for the grace of God we might be in their place. So we must not be too hard on them. Let us bring so pure and refined a writer as Ruskin to say a good word for them. In a characteristic passage which I cannot for the moment lay my hands on, but which is to be found in "Lectures on Art," Ruskin notices this obscene tendency in some English writers. He compares Dante with Shakespeare in this respect, and asks us to observe how, while Dante's high bearing frowns at the foul jests and talk of coarse people, Shakespeare seems to take a delight in listening to them and copying them; and he notes how Chaucer also in an atmosphere as wild and sweet as an April morning, does yet often stoop and sniff at these unpleasant odours and ordures with delight. That is to be regretted. But Ruskin says very pointedly, "You will find a strain of this coarseness in all the greatest English writers; it is one of the marks of the true English spirit; you never get the richest fruits of English literature without these weeds. They grow in the same soil." So our Mr. Smallfilth and Mr. Leerit and the rest of them may claim that, according to Ruskin, they are merely a rank outburst of the true English spirit.

What is of great importance to note is the fact that they are growing less active and less popular in most places, and that they are being gradually driven to the smaller and less reputable theatres and music halls. And this improvement has been coincident with the gradual diminution of drinking habits, and more notably with the gradual appearance on the music-hall stage of a better entertainment in the form of regular sketches and plays.

Moreover, most of the gentlemen I have named in both groups often flash out pieces of genuine rough satire and wit, with appropriate gestures and expressions. They are generally adepts in the art of keeping the stage alive at every moment, and of constantly

amusing their audiences; and here they have the advantage of many actors on our regular stage. But their works contain many coarse, veiled indecencies. The second group of authors I have named undoubtedly stand in need of some sort of a Censor, and their existence might justify an argument for his retention—if only he could be present in every theatre and music-hall of the kingdom at every performance. And even then he would find many of the objectionable things too impalpable and too intangible to be proceeded against.

Taking both these groups of authors together, it is pretty plain that so long as they keep just outside the boundaries of open indecency, the Censor cannot touch them. We are all agreed that they are to be tolerated or welcomed according to our tastes and moods. A large section of playgoers still idolizes them, and therefore they must be allowed free riot so long as they do not much overstep the mark. When they do, they will be corrected by whatever good or moral sense is active in the audience. And this sense in the audience of what is allowable will still remain the final and habitual gauge of their proceedings, whether we have a Censor or not.

But it may be urged that the gentlemen I have named are not authors at all. For the purposes of the Censor they are authors—that is, they contribute a very large and vital part of the total entertainment, the moral effect of which upon the audience it is supposed to be the Censor's business to control. But the irony of it is, that while Sophocles and Shelley are easily accessible to the Censor's whip, Mr. Smallfilth and Mr. Slangwheezy rarely come within the clang of it; while Mr. Bluewink and Mr. Leerit stand grinning at him with their thumbs to their noses from a hundred stages every night. And meantime, those intellectual playgoers who wish to see one performance of Shelley or Sophocles are stamped by the Censor as immoral persons.

Thus the rule of the Censorship is proved to be "Gag Shelley! Gag Sophocles! License Mr. Small-filth! License Mr. Slangwheezy! Take no notice of Mr. Bluewink and Mr. Leerit!"

To sum up, sir, the total effect of the Censorship on Mr. Zangwill's three all-inclusive classes of dramatists is as follows :

As regards the "pioneers" and poets the Censor is mischievous.

As regards the "plain men" the Censor is superfluous.

As regards the "pornographers" the Censor is impotent.

That is how the system has worked in the past, even under such an ideal Censor as Mr. Pigott. That is the system, sir, which you and your Committee are now deliberating whether you shall renew under some form or another.

How will it work in the future? Certainly no better, probably very much worse, because of the new forces that have been recently awakened. What will happen when the next play is vetoed? Again there will be a scandal, again a society will be formed to produce the play, again the Censor will be defeated, and, the play being splendidly advertised by his action, again six or eight times as many playgoers will be brought under its immoral influence (if it is immoral) as would have been brought under it if there had been no Censor at all.

Is it proposed to continue the single Censor? The case of Mr. Pigott, an ideal man for the post, is before us. The single Censor, with his indisputable authority, has, as we may hope, vanished for ever.

Certain variants of the Censorship have been proposed to you, but of course only in the event of the Government being fixed in its determination to keep some sort of Censorship at the risk of constant irritation, scandal, agitation, and defeat. With continued deference to you, sir, and to your Committee, may I be

permitted to examine these variant proposals and to inquire how they would work?

The establishment of an Optional Censorship has been proposed by some who command our exceptional regard. It would have the very great advantage of leaving uncensored those rising sincere authors who do not wish to be censored; but who, in the opinion of many excellent, timorous mortals, are the only authors who deserve to be censored. Again, it would have the further advantage of allowing those to be censored who are hungering for it.

To deny any man the comfort of being censored, if he craves for it, would be against the broad principle of toleration which I am here advocating. Therefore let those who want to be censored join together, form a select little coterie, and appoint their own Censor. I have shown what stamp of man the office of Censor breeds, and what are the qualifications for it. I don't think they ought to pay him more than a hundred a year. Honestly, I don't think the business is worth more. In the present state of the labour market a man could be got who would do a heap of censoring for a hundred pounds. There are many well-conducted shopmen and City clerks out of a situation who would gladly undertake the post on these terms; and who, so far as public morality is concerned, are quite as well qualified to perform its duties as the present and late occupants of the post; and quite as well qualified to dictate to Sir Herbert Tree and Mr. George Alexander what plays they shall not produce. Let one of these deserving clerks or shopmen, then, be appointed to the post of Optional Censor. It would not solve our present difficulties; but it would appease the craving of those who are crying out to be censored, and it would do this at their own expense, instead of at the expense of the taxpayer. Further, by aiding an unfortunate victim of our present social arrangements, it would contribute towards the solution of the unemployment

question. These advantages may be claimed for an Optional Censorship; if it is tried at all, let it be tried on these grounds, but not on the ground that it will clear up our present muddle. For it leaves the name of Censor to dominate our drama, if it can. And that name will so far dominate our drama, as to lull the public into the false and pernicious security that somebody has been appointed to look after its morality in the theatre. And the result of the public having this false security is that Sophocles and Shelley get vetoed, and that Smallfilth and Bluewink and Leerit have their full fling.

It has been urged that we must retain the Censor for fear that religious people who hate the drama will begin to meddle and meddle, and end by upsetting our dramatic apple-cart altogether. It is a base and cowardly plea. Why have religious people hated the theatre, and kept apart from it? Because Smallfilth and Leerit and their crew have had such a large ascendancy in it. Why have Smallfilth and Leerit and their crew had such a large ascendancy in the theatre? Because religious people have hated it and kept apart from it. The sooner we get out of that vicious circle the better.

I beg every minister of religion in the kingdom and all religious people to come to the theatre and meddle and meddle with it until they have upset our present dramatic apple-cart. They will work a larger dramatic reform than was correspondingly wrought a few years back in the music halls when some of the same best elements of our national life meddled for a season, caused an outcry, and thereby helped to raise the standard of entertainment in music halls all over the kingdom, and to give them an extended and higher sphere of influence. Such an interference would be good both for the drama and for religion. Let it be started at once. We shall doubtless pass through a rough, awkward, troublesome period. But pangs and

cries and distortions are the signs of coming life. After a time of wrangling and inconvenience our drama will be more firmly established, on stronger foundations, and on a higher level.

To revert for a moment to the extraordinary demand to be censored which has been put forward by our leading London managers. It is inexplicable.

May I ask Sir Herbert Tree upon what he founds his unwarrantable, nay his most unjust, suspicions of the judgment of the manager of His Majesty's Theatre? Upon what he founds his opposition to that manager's right to put before the public the plays that he thinks fit? Will Sir Herbert cast his eyes over the record of His Majesty's Theatre, and tell us why the man who can show it, is to be harried and thwarted in his relations with that public by a distracted Court official, with all the misqualifications for his mischievously mismanaged office that every Censor must necessarily possess? And does the public itself believe that this same helpless bewildered official is a better taster for them than the manager of His Majesty's, who has given them many proofs of his willingness to produce high-class plays?

We have, I hope, dismissed the Optional Censor as being only another impossible specimen of a decaying race. A suggestion has been made that you should retain the Examiner of Plays, and take away his veto. That is, you are to put the unhappy man into a position where he has all his present difficulties, responsibilities, and liabilities to abuse from all sides; you are to give him tremendous authority, and then tell him he is not to wield it—except for the deadly mischievous purpose of ruining a play's reputation before it is produced, and frightening all the leading managers away from it. This variant seems to have all the disadvantages of the present system, with the additional one of making the Examiner and his office even yet more ridiculous than they already are; while it still leaves him considerable

power to work mischief. It would assuredly work more clumsily, more disastrously, and, in one sense, more amusingly than the present system; it would probably deal out equal injustice to unknown and rising authors with high and serious aims; it would offer a constant butt to scoffers, and a constant handle to agitators. I wonder what kind of man would undertake the Censorship of Plays on the condition that he was not to veto what he thought to be harmful and corrupt? What possible value or weight would thoughtful people attach to such a man's mere opinion on the intrinsic morality of a play?

Another proposal is that you should establish over us a board of arbitration, as if we were a band of miners fighting for the very clear and practical issue of settling our means of livelihood, with all the conditions and factors exactly ascertainable and definable; or a company of railway directors desirous of buying land for our shareholders, again with all the attendant circumstances exactly ascertainable and appraisable.

A board of arbitration to settle something so elusive, so intangible, so priceless as the intrinsic morality of a play! Surely no more whimsical idea has been conceived these two centuries past! I rub my eyes, and I ask its proposer, as Pliable asked Christian on a famous occasion, "Brother Christian, where are we now?" We seem to have returned to the days of the Commonwealth, when countless experiments of this kind were made only to prove that they must fail. Something of the kind we have been attempting in our present Censorship, and what is the result? Here is an unfortunate gentleman who has hopelessly and ludicrously failed in his impossible task, and is floundering about in a woeful mess. We have a plain proof before our eyes of what happens when we take away the Censorship of Plays from their only, and, in the long run, their inevitable Censor, the public. And it is cruelly proposed to push three more unfortunate gentlemen into the mess

after him; with the only possible results of proving what is already proved up to the hilt, and of making them sooner or later the companions of his distresses and failures. For, sir, who that has sincere convictions about his work, and has written it in good faith, will rest content that it shall be censored and defamed and destroyed by any one, or any three, or any thirty Censors you may appoint?

Further, it will not be the three men who will give the verdict. As in most cases of arbitration, it will generally be the nominee called in who will finally decide the matter. Let us see what will happen. Firstly two men are to be chosen, one of them by the Lord Chamberlain, that is, virtually by the Examiner of Plays. Now unless the Examiner of Plays wishes to stultify himself he will take care that this first arbitrator shall be on his side. Otherwise he will have raised the question only to prove that he is a bad judge and incompetent for his office. It does not seem to be a good way of choosing our first arbitrator. For to all intents and purposes he will be the Examiner himself, and according to his strength of character and the strength of his convictions; that is, according to his fitness for any office, the Examiner will ensure himself against defeat. So our first arbitrator has already given his judgment. Our second arbitrator is to be chosen by the Dramatic Sub-Committee of the Society of Authors. Here, again, the author of the play will take care to ensure himself from defeat beforehand, by seeing that somebody is chosen who will certainly give his vote in favour of his client. If he cannot get this he will, if he is wise, withdraw his play and find the very easy means of working an agitation, and appealing to the public at once. Thus again the futility of the Censor will be proved. But it is fairly probable that our author will not find it difficult to get from the Dramatic Sub-Committee an arbitrator whose verdict will be firm on his side; as the sympathies of dramatic authors will

generally tend to be with him. It does not seem to be a good way of choosing our second arbitrator. Because, in most cases, we shall merely again call in one whose verdict is a foregone conclusion. This is, of course, what happens in most arbitration cases—with this vast difference—that as most arbitrators are judging matters of ascertainable facts and ascertainable values they must be, to some extent, guided to their verdict by those facts and values. While here we are called upon to decide upon an elusive matter of opinion, where personal likings and personal prejudices can hide themselves, and have unfettered and even unconscious sway. Indeed, here we come upon the root of the whole difficulty; which is, that we are trying to give a hard and categorical judgment upon a most elusive matter of opinion.

Now nothing approaching a hard and categorical judgment is possible when the question is that of the moral effect of a new book or play upon the general public. Thus Mr. Godly-Slime brings out his new religious melodrama, *Maria, the Martyr*. It is evident to most thinking people that *Maria, the Martyr*, is a cheap tawdry sham of a peculiarly offensive type—the religious type. But many quite sincere people declare they have been moved and uplifted by it. And some of them write to the papers and say that in producing *Maria, the Martyr*, Mr. Godly-Slime has helped them to save their souls; and that being the case, they are anxious to give him a testimonial to that effect. And perhaps Mr. Godly-Slime has really stirred and raised them. Such adepts are we all in the art of self-deception, it is quite likely that Mr. Godly-Slime himself supposes he is a great moral elevator, and thrills with the delightful sensations of having morally benefited the public, and of having made a pot of money by the process. At any rate we must leave the public to be the judges of whether *Maria, the Martyr*, is helping them to save their souls. Or are we to tell

them that they don't know when their souls are being saved; and then proceed forcibly to defraud them of Mr. Godly-Slime's ministrations? "You're cutting my nose," cried out the lathered patient to the barber. "Nonsense!" replied the barber; "allow me to be the best judge of whether I'm cutting your nose or no." But surely we must allow the man himself to be the best judge in such intimate matters as those of whether his nose is being cut, and whether his soul is being saved.

To get the materials for forming anything approaching a hard and categorical judgment of the moral effect of a new play on the masses, we should have to submit the matter to the country in the form of a referendum. It would, of course, be very costly and troublesome, but it would give us a basis for our judgment. But, sir, this is what I am proposing—a referendum that will cost us neither trouble nor money; since if we leave the matter alone, playgoers are already willing and waiting to give us the only materials for forming a judgment without a Censor at all.

And indeed this is just what playgoers are already doing. They are giving us the materials for forming a judgment; and they are gradually enforcing their own decision upon us, in spite of all our aggravating interference. Let us glance at the plays that were formerly vetoed and are now licensed—the *Dame aux Camélias*, *Samson and Delilah*, and several others. It is because at last the public judgment has found a troublesome and roundabout, but effective, way of expressing itself that these plays have been licensed. For the rest, the plays that have disappeared, or about which there is no present discussion, they are in exactly the same position as they would have been without a Censor—with this reservation, that many of them would have disappeared more quickly if he hadn't interfered.

Why, then, should we, at the cost of all this bother, irritation, and money, force public opinion to express itself in a long, troublesome, and roundabout way, only

to get the better of us in the end; when it is waiting to express itself directly and simply without the least trouble, in the only way conformable to English feelings, and to the spirit of the English law?

A hard and categorical judgment for present use is what is required of the Censor. A judgment that is not hard and categorical is no judgment at all. And the hard and categorical judgment he can only form by the means I have pointed out—the referendum.

Let us return to our arbitrators. We will suppose them to have met. And we will suppose them to have been chosen, as arbitrators generally are, because they are reputed to be experts on their subject. Naturally they will differ diametrically, as competent experts generally do on any subject. And this natural opposition of experts will be stubbornly reinforced by the implied pledge given to each of their clients. A little formal discussion will take place, and then will come a pull-devil pull-baker tussle which will generally be quite friendly. The tussle will not last very long, because each must see that the other has quite plausible reasons for holding out. If they have any humour, the absurdity of the situation and the hopelessness of their task will now strike them; and if they are sensible men, as humorous men generally are, they will shake hands, have a good dinner together, and agree to refer the matter to the judge who ought to have decided it at first, and who must decide it at last, however many Censors intervene—the playgoing public. Let us hope this is what will happen at the first meeting of our arbitrators.

But they may not see the absurdity of their position, or they may feel bound to call in the third arbitrator. Here we get back to the one man Censor, with the same impossibility before him of fixing a definite satisfying judgment on a matter of floating opinion. And for this most delicate and arduous task of somehow temporarily appearing to solve the difficulty, he is, it seems,

to receive very poor pay. Poor fellow, in both senses!

The third arbitrator is then to be nominated. This is almost bound to happen in every case. If they can agree on him, he is to be chosen by the first two arbitrators. If they are loyal to their respective clients, they won't agree, and this again is almost sure to happen. Then the Prime Minister is to be called in.

It does not seem to be a good way of choosing our third arbitrator. It seems unkind when the Prime Minister is already engaged in solving many other insoluble problems, to drag him into another imbroglio, and ask him to search for some man who can do the job which everybody else has found to be impossible. If the Prime Minister really enters upon the search in earnest, it will take up a great deal of his time; and just now, sir, he is very busy looking after my financial concerns. I will yield to no one in my care and love for the interests of the English drama; but I am at the present moment a very much overburdened taxpayer. I would, however, put my own pecuniary interests aside, if I felt sure the Prime Minister would succeed in his search. But I have the gravest doubts. In any case I question if for the next few years the Prime Minister, whether he is Mr. Balsquith or Mr. Askfour, may not be better employed in trying to lighten our financial burdens, than in searching for temporary Censors for the English stage. I'm afraid the electors on both sides might think he was making a bad use of his time.

However, granted the Prime Minister can discover another more or less competent expert, we are still in the same difficulty, and again one man is to pronounce his definite judgment on an elusive matter upon which two competent experts have already disagreed; and thereby he is to have the chance of ruining, at any rate for the time, any rising dramatist's hopes and ambitions and resources. May I point out, sir, that the whole idea of this proposed arbitration rests upon the assumption

that any two of the most competent available experts on it are sure to disagree—a thing that ought to condemn it at once.

However, let us call in the third arbitrator. The great point to be noticed about him is that while he will virtually be a temporary autocratic Censor, and therefore open to all the objections that have been laid at the door of the present one; and while he will certainly be badgered and assailed in the same fashion, he is yet likely to be a far less competent person to decide the matter, so far as any decision is possible. The present Censor has had practice and routine and some technical knowledge to guide him; he is backed up by the authority of the government, and by the prestige of the Lord Chamberlain. Yet see what a quagmire he is in! Our temporary Censor will have none of these advantages to aid him in securing respect for his verdict. Then, again, he will have no experience of the work of his post. Now the peculiarity of the Censorship is that it is a post where experience can be of no value at all in the performance of its duties, but is of enormous use in evading and escaping from its difficulties. And the third arbitrator will be quite without this necessary qualification.

What sort of man is likely to be appointed our temporary Censor? In those rare cases when the first two arbitrators agree upon a man, they yet cannot possibly appoint any of the men best qualified for the task. Who are the best men? From the one point of view the best man for the task would be an experienced dramatist. From the other point of view the best man would be an experienced moralist. I do not know any experienced moralist who is an experienced dramatist. And I much fear, sir, that an experienced dramatist might not be generally accepted as an experienced moralist. Though he is sometimes a great moralist while the Censor is stifling him, and a rabble is hooting him for being immoral.

The experienced moralist would not have the necessary acquaintance with the dramatic side of the question and all its ramifications. Valuable as he would be on the one side, he is therefore debarred from being the sole judge. But an experienced moralist and an experienced dramatist together would seem to go far towards meeting the exigencies of the case. So why not drag in another two arbitrators? Why not drag in another twenty? Why not drag in another two thousand?—Ah, sir, why not save all this trouble and drag in the playgoing public at once, since to their judgment it must come at last?

The experienced moralist is therefore debarred from being our third arbitrator. The experienced dramatist is obviously the best man for the job, so far as a wide knowledge of the whole business qualifies him to judge. But here we go round the mulberry bush again; for a dramatist, and, in the majority of the cases we have considered, a very experienced dramatist—Sophocles, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Brieux, Shaw—was the original judge, and him we have disqualified, arraigned, and dismissed at the bidding of whom?—Mr. Redford.

I do not claim that an artist is always the best, or is always even a capable, judge of his own work. Very often he is not. But more often he is; for he is the only man who accurately knows how much spiritual force has gone out of him to produce it. And the remarkable thing is that the greater the artist, the more trustworthy, as a rule, his judgment has been; witness many illustrious examples, where the great artist and the great poet have been at the start almost solitary judges of the real value of their work; and where the rightness of their judgment has finally been confirmed, in the only way possible, by the verdict and general acclamation of the public. At any rate, the living dramatists who have been Censored are certainly far more capable judges of both drama and morality than any Censor who has yet dawned upon the horizon.

To return to our third arbitrator. Forgive me, sir, for bestowing so much consideration upon him. We are, apparently, threatened with being placed for some years to come under the jurisdiction not of one Censor, but of four. It is, however, the third arbitrator who will hold the key of the position, and who will be our master so far as his power extends. It is therefore necessary not only to look well at him, but to strip him bare, to turn him inside out and upside down. It will be kinder to render him these services now, rather than to leave the Stage Society to do it more publicly in a year or two's time, when he has perhaps done some mischief and caused another scandal like the recent one.

We have seen that an experienced dramatist has the widest knowledge of the subject, and is therefore the man our two original arbitrators ought to get. Unfortunately he too is debarred. He would not, or rather he ought not to, accept the position. Not indeed on the score that he is not a competent moralist. But it is not fair to place a dramatic author in a position where he may be obliged, if he is an honest man, publicly to declare that his friend's, his brother author's play is immoral, and not fit to be seen in public. How many dramatic authors would accept such a responsibility? Generally, of course, his sympathies and fellow-feeling would ensure his verdict for the author. He would almost necessarily be the echo of the author's arbitrator. Dramatic authors are generally friends, but little differences and secret enmities do occasionally rise amongst them. In any case, a dramatic author as arbitrator would generally be the friend, always the competitor, sometimes perhaps the unconscious enemy of the man whose cause he was called upon to decide, and whose reputation would be temporarily placed in his hands. He could not be an unbiased judge. Again, even if he could be quite sure of his freedom from all kinds of prejudice, the fact that he might be, and could scarcely

help being, an interested and biased judge would tend to discount the weight of his verdict with the public, whom, it may be observed, we have to call in at every step. On all these counts, then, the best men, in respect of knowledge of the case, are disqualified from being chosen as our third arbitrator. Seeing the best men are not available, our first two arbitrators must try to agree upon some second best man. Who is the second best man for the job? Probably some old playgoer of good social standing. He must be fairly old; so as to have as much experience of the working of the engine as can be gained from constantly looking at its boiler and funnel, and hearing it whistle. He will probably belong to the good old ante-friction days, and is therefore out of touch with the present and swelling currents of public opinion. Anyhow, he is the best man we can get, and we must put up with him. And now, sir, it has doubtless struck you that we have merely gone round the mulberry bush once more, for here we are back again at the paying playgoing public. And why should one member rather than another of the paying playgoing public be called upon to decide this important question? Many thousands of them have equal qualifications. Why call in one of them when so large a number of them are competent to be judges of their own business, and are ready to relieve us of all the bother? That, as a general rule, they are competent I have abundantly shown, for I have brought before you many millions of them, who have been illegally taking care of their own morality in the variety theatres for the last ten years or so.

There was once a man who very piously wound up his clock every night for twenty years. At the end of twenty years he discovered it to be an eight-day clock.

But as was clearly shown, it is highly improbable that our first two arbitrators will agree. Except in very rare cases it is the Prime Minister who will have to hunt up our third arbitrator. I say "hunt up," because,

as we have seen, he is a very difficult man to find. And if the Prime Minister is merely going to nod or beckon to somebody in a haphazard way, then the business is likely to be marred still further, and we get less security than ever. No. Let us hope that when the Prime Minister does tackle this business, he will set about it in a grave, severe, conscientious way. And then if he does make a huge mistake, he can claim that he made it, like Bridlegoose, or Foresight in Congreve's comedy, after a great deal of painstaking, laborious zeal and deliberation. And, sir, this sovereign merit, the merit of having made a huge mistake after much earnest thought and labour—this evergreen laurel wreath hangs easily within reach of your brows and the brows of your fellow Committeemen, if you advise the renewal of the Censor on the English stage.

Well, the Prime Minister obligingly puts aside the business of the nation and addresses himself to the serious work of finding our third arbitrator. The Prime Minister will find himself in something of a dilemma. Here is a very thorny and vexatious little business; at present of no political importance, but which might conceivably flame out into a big blaze. Suppose somebody were to write a political play dealing in a serious way with some social-political question upon which the political parties were divided. The conditions are all ripe for it; pamphlet plays are the fashion of the day; a body of earnest, determined men would be ready to take it up, snap their fingers at our arbitrators, and triumphantly get the piece played—which would not be difficult, as experience has shown. No harm would be done to the public; indeed, some good might come of it. For quite possibly the question might be treated in a loftier and more searching way on the stage than by debate in the House of Commons; it might be handled in a spirit free from party jealousies, and ambitions, and exigencies. No harm would be done to the public; but in the hurly-burly considerable

disturbance and damage might be wrought politically—on the wrong side, of course. The matter might become alarming.

The Prime Minister is our last hope. We are in a more desperate tangle than ever; we cling to him and beseech him on our knees to appoint somebody to solve this insoluble problem.

Who is now the best man available for us? The post has unexpectedly become a political one. Whom shall we get? You know the kind of man, sir, who is usually appointed to this sort of job. A safe man is the only man who can get us to some temporary anchorage. A safe man is necessary to preside here, as indeed in most cases of arbitration. Arbitration means compromise, and in cases that can be settled by arbitration, the safe man is the right man. He can give a bit to one, and a bit to the other; fourpence to Smith, twopence ha'penny to Brown. But arbitration is useless where no compromise is possible, where a plain "Yes" or "No" is the only answer that can be given. It is not an arbitrator, or three, or thirty arbitrators that we want; but a judge, or three judges, or three thousand judges who have authority to enforce their decision. Such a judge we have in the playgoing public.

In religion and in politics safe men are often very useful; but in literature and art they are eternally our pestilent obstructors and stumbling-blocks,—and generally our presidents and chairmen.

To return. A safe, respectable man who will quiet things down awhile is now our only possible Censor. He settles himself to his task. He sees that it is hopeless so far as concerns the original purpose of the inquiry, that of giving an unbiased decisive "Yes" or "No" as to the effect of the play on public morality. That purpose has now disappeared, and so far as possible must be covered up. He is not there to judge the play, but to get his party out of a threatened mess. His verdict must go accordingly. He does his best

to quiet things down; if he is a clever man he does perhaps somehow get them more or less quieted down for the time. Meantime the Stage Society has been giving performances of the play. In a short time, however, things quiet down of themselves, according to the fashion of all human affairs. A few months pass by, possibly a few years, and then another play turns up; again our Censors are called in, again there is a scandal, again the play is performed, and again the Censors are defeated. And so we go round the mulberry bush again. Such is the indomitable pig-headedness of facts. They never will listen to reason, but stick doggedly there, waiting till reason listens to them.

I fear I must have wearied your patience, sir. But errors and fallacies die so hard that once killing them does them no harm. They have to be killed twenty times over. And this grotesque Jack's giant of a third arbitrator threatened to stalk about our English stage, and cause so much trouble to future chairmen of future Censorship Committees that I hope they at least, if you cannot, will pardon me for having tried to get rid of him.

One reason that makes the Censorship impossible to-day lies in the fact that modern plays are no longer chiefly pieces of declamation and lengths of dialogue, as they were when the Censorship was established. When there were but few theatres, and these were all playing pieces whose text was their main feature, that text, and whatever business was its necessary illustration, could easily be kept under the Censor's vigilance. To-day it is not so. The Censor sits in his office vetoing Sophocles and Shelley and Ibsen, and their kin ancient and modern, with the full text of their plays before him. Meanwhile Mr. Slangwheezy and Mr. Bawlrot are almost out of his reach, and Mr. Bluewink and Mr. Leerit slip away from him altogether. And this will continue under any form of Censorship that can be devised; so large and important is that part of

modern stage work which lies outside the mere bare words.

What follows from this? If you renew the Censorship at all, you will in fact be setting up a form of literary Censorship, not over literature generally, but over Sophocles and Shelley, and rising and sincere modern dramatists. Having regard to what has been urged about the essential sameness of the spoken and the written word, I submit to you, sir, that the question you are really deliberating is whether you shall continue a literary Censorship; at least a Censorship radically of the same kind and hitherto kept in existence by the same arguments and considerations as the Censorship which Milton destroyed two hundred and fifty years ago. This point has already been ably argued before you; and I need not dwell upon it, except to claim that it securely classes the reasons for the abolition of the Censorship with those reasons that prevailed to remove the literary Censorship, and to remove religious disabilities—that is to say, it brings our pleading into harmony with the great principle of toleration which has guided English state policy for some centuries.

May I, with the greatest respect, point out to you, sir, that the abolition of the Censorship is part of the wise and fruitful policy which gave votes and political power to the great race from which you sprung; and without whose benevolent operation you would not now be a member of the English government, sitting to judge this matter? It would be a pleasing and fitting thing if you, sir, should direct the building of this last missing pinnacle upon the great edifice of toleration which has been slowly raised in England during these centuries.

But if you and your Committee are tempted to renew the Censorship, may I respectfully submit to you, sir, that it can never have any secure existence? The Censorship of Plays can only be securely established in England, if and when some kind of a Catholic Church

is also securely established. And when a Catholic Church (not necessarily the Roman) is established, many other things besides plays may be harmoniously, and indeed will necessarily have to be, censored as well.

I have brought before you the testimony of what is practically the whole body of English playgoers—the testimony not of their mouths, but the more telling one of their behaviour in the theatre for the last fifteen years. Will you let me bring in one further witness before the inquiry is finally closed—that of the greatest and sanest voice that has been heard in Europe since Bacon? When we can get a pronouncement from Goethe it is worth heeding. Will you then, sir, allow Goethe to be the last witness to appear before you? Goethe had many wonderful divinations,¹ and, curiously enough, he divined our present perplexities, and their innocent and adorable cause—the young lady of fifteen.

Goethe says, "What business have our young girls at the theatre? The theatre is for men and women who know something of human affairs. But now we cannot get rid of these young girls, and pieces which are weak, and therefore *proper*, will continue to be produced. Be wise and stay away, as I do." Stay away from the theatre! Goethe, who was such a lover of the theatre! Stay away from it! Yes, naturally, when weak and *proper* pieces are being produced, weak and proper persons go to see them, and intellectual people stay away. Goethe stayed away from the theatre for the same reason that intellectual playgoers in England have been staying away from our English theatre for some generations. So if we are to have a living drama in England, to that extent the darling maiden must be disregarded by the

¹ Perhaps the most marvellous of all Goethe's divinations was that on our Irish policy. In 1829 he said, "Catholic Emancipation will not cure the woes of Ireland. There is no cure for the woes of Ireland." Has this fact ever been noted in Parliament? Goethe's prophecy has been constantly verified during the past eighty years, and seems about to receive a new reinforcement.

dramatist. Is she then not to be considered at all? Is she to be shocked and sullied at random? No! No! No! and yet No, again! She is our maturing queen-bee, and holds all the future life and welfare of our hive. Seeing how much is at stake here, she must be protected most rigorously—by her father and mother. The dramatist is not her guardian. Still less can the Censor be her effectual guardian. Till a certain age, I should make it a year or two later than fifteen, she should be taken only to plays that do not portray life in a deep and searching way—may we not say, in a sincere way? There are many theatres in London where such pieces are being played. She is in no danger of being left to mope at home. But even here, in our scientific world of to-day, it is a balancing of good and evil that must decide how much, and how long, knowledge shall be withheld from her. Again Goethe has a wise word on it. "Life," he says, "daily displays the most scandalous scenes in abundance. With children, people need by no means be so anxious about the effect of a book or a play. Daily life is more instructive than the most effective books or plays." The world at large to-day produces far more scandalous plays than the English stage, and children cannot be kept from constantly seeing and hearing them.

Again, about one of our recently vetoed authors Goethe says, "If a poet has as high a soul as Sophocles his influence will always be moral, let him do what he will." Mark that, Mr. Licensor. Is *Œdipus* still unlicensed?

Again, Goethe has a word of admonition for some of our "pioneers." Speaking of certain authors he says, "They write as if they were ill, and the whole world was a lazaretto. They speak of the woe and misery of this earth." He complains that they do not make us "contented with the world and our condition," and he contrasts them with authors "who arm men with courage to undergo the conflicts of life." How few of

our pioneers "arm us with courage to undergo the conflicts of life"

Goethe has two passages bearing directly on our present discussion. He says, "'Cain' was at first prohibited in England. It was folly, for there is nothing in 'Cain' which is not taught by the English Bishops themselves."

And for a last piece of evidence to bring before you, sir, what could be more conclusive than the following: "With 'Werther' people found so much fault, that if I had erased every passage that was censured, scarcely a line of the whole book would have been left. However, all the censure did me no harm, for these subjective judgments of individuals, important as they may be, are at last rectified by the masses."

"Rectified by the masses"! It is Goethe's verdict on Censorships. It is the bitter epitaph on all Censorships.

Ever since Englishmen found out that burning each other was not a convincing or conclusive way of settling differences of opinions and ideas, the great principle of toleration has guided English state policy. Our present plea is founded upon it. Will you not take the honour that will fall to him who, sooner or later, applies it to the English drama? Or will you re-establish some form of Censorship to be a pompous farce for the public; a festering little thorn in the hand of future governments; a tangle of worries for a future Censorship Committee; and a continual mockery of your present proceedings?

I ask your pardon for this long intrusion. At starting I had no intention of trespassing so far upon your time and patience. But seeing there was no chance of my being cross-examined on the points I was raising, I had to try to meet all possible objections and inquiries.

May I beg your indulgence for a little longer, while I enter upon the far more pleasant work of construction?

May I submit a scheme which seems to offer the hope of a settlement of our difficulties? It has at least these merits: it is simple; it is comprehensive; it is not costly; it promises to work easily; so far as any arrangement can be final, it promises a permanent settlement; above all, it is in the spirit of English law making, and not outside general English law altogether, as the Censorship is, and must be.

Many years ago, writing on this subject, I said: "If the Censor is to be continued, let him look upon himself as a policeman to stop indecency. Let him not meddle with morality or immorality." This radical difference between indecency and immorality, which indeed governs the whole question, was clearly brought out before you in the evidence of the Bishop of Southwark; a high clear utterance, a very lofty voice, speaking in the manner of the noblest traditions of the English Church.

O high clear thoughts, high clear words, high clear deeds, Saviours of Israel, why are ye as strangers in the land, and as wayfaring men that tarry for a night?

English dramatists and English actors should always keep within earshot of the Bishop of Southwark's words. They are a powerful witness to the essential dignity to our callings.

The Bishop's distinction between immorality and indecency goes to the root of the matter. We are all substantially agreed about what is indecency. Within very narrow limits, it is distinguishable by every citizen, and there is little possibility of any one mistaking it. It is not so with immorality. It is not so with morality. Least of all is it so with that intrinsic morality which is the spirit of some works of art and literature that at the first glance are outwardly repulsive. Here, sir, the average citizen will tell me that he does know what morality is. Bear with me a moment while I show him how confused are his stock notions of morality. To

use Milton's phrase, let me "stagger him out of his catechism."

The average citizen holds *Hamlet* in reverence. He places it in his daughter's hands, and, as a rule, he allows her to go to a theatre to see it. It is, perhaps, the most frequently played piece on the English stage. It deals with an incestuous marriage, and the average citizen would to-day boo it from the stage and repeat his favourite catchword, "How is it our leading dramatists will choose these very unpleasant subjects?"

So much for the natural opinion of the average citizen on the morality of *Hamlet*.

Let me stagger him further. We have seen how confused are the notions of the average playgoer on morality. Let us now see how confused are the notions of the average churchgoer.

Next Sunday morning in every English church and chapel the average citizen will sing with fervour the psalms of a treacherous murderer, liar, and adulterer—"Send me Uriah the Hittite"; "Why didst thou not go down to thy house?" "Tarry here to-day also"; "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die." The foul, sneaking murderer! The cunning, planning, deliberate murderer! Who is it speaking? Is it Macbeth? No, Macbeth was at least a faithful spouse, and this man is an adulterer as well as a murderer. Who is it speaking? It is the man after God's own heart! Ah, but he repented! Then let us give him sympathy as deep as his sin, as deep as his contrition. For in one by-path or another, all we like sheep have gone astray, and there is no health in us. Yes, let us make haste to forgive him entirely! But take him to our hearts and homes? Quote him? Sing him? Make him the daily companion and adviser of our innocent boys and girls? Hold him up to their admiration and love? Enrol him as a saint? If this had happened in Brixton —! Sort out your ideas of morality, Mr. Average Citizen!

How can you for one moment admit such a man as David into the bosom of your family? You call yourself a judge of morality, Mr. Average Citizen!

Yes, and so you are in the long run. Through his terrible sins you have discerned the royal qualities of the man; his instinctive nobility ("When one told me, 'Behold Saul is dead,' thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him and slew him, who thought that I would have given him a reward"); his capacity to rule ("Whatsoever the King did pleased all the people"); his chivalry ("Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem"); his courage ("Let no man's heart fail, thy servant will go and fight this Philistine"); his loyal friendship ("I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan"); his wise acceptance of Death ("While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept"); his boundless fatherly love ("Oh Absalom, my son, my son!"); his instant response to Nathan's rebuke ("I have sinned against the Lord"); his cheerful religion ("The King shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord")—Ah, Mr. Average Citizen, your instinct is true, your verdict on David is just. You have most rightly made him a saint and an exemplar—you have most rightly made him the loved companion of your boys and girls.

Why shouldn't King David be seen on our stage? For is there anywhere to be found so astonishing a compass of human activities, affections, sympathies, aspirations, adventures, sins, crimes, virtues, loves, hates, revenges, miseries, repentances, despairs, triumphs—son, brother, father, husband, shepherd, giantkiller, musician, actor, liar, lover, murderer, adulterer, captain, warrior, legislator, prophet, poet, king—is there in all history or poetry or fiction, a character that stands up to give us such complete assurance of being a man, as that of David as portrayed in the Bible? I know of nothing that comes near it. Here is our superman. Not in the future, for we cannot so marshal all the

thousand baffling factors as to have the faintest idea of what our future superman will be like. Certainly we can never consciously evolve him. Here is our superman, ready to our hand—David, King of Israel.

But if the case of David had been a present-day one, and had come before a modern Censor, do you suppose David would have been passed at all, and allowed to exercise his deep religious influence on your family? No, if our modern Censor had been called in, David would have been hounded out of decent Brixton society. Nay, if you were Censor to-day yourself, Mr. Average Citizen, would you not veto him, out of a correct sense of what you owe to your office, and a muddled sense of what you owe to your family?

Why shouldn't you have David as a hero of a modern play? You cannot, however reverently he may be treated. You cannot have David, but you can have Mr. Smallfilth, Mr. Bluewink, Mr. Bawlrot, Mr. Apegrin, Mr. Leerit, and the rest. Well, have them! Re-establish your Censor over you, and have them! You who had Shakespeare without a Censor, continue with a Censor to have the most impotent, ineffectual stage amongst the great nations.

You want no Censor, Mr. Average Citizen, to look after your morality. But wake up, man, and look after it yourself! You have no right to put a man in office to guard your morality, for then you go to sleep over it yourself.

I have tried to show the point of view of the average citizen, or what would be his point of view, if the case of David had not long ago been sifted and "rectified by the masses." Not by the masses of any one "present" day, but by the masses in the course of time.

The average citizen cannot, it seems, be sure that his individual judgment is well founded any more than can the Censor. All our individual judgments, whether of Censor or citizen, on morality, especially on intrinsic morality, have finally to be "rectified by the masses."

This distinction, then, between indecency and immorality, or rather morality, is our guide. We can be pretty sure of ourselves about what constitutes indecency. We cannot be immediately sure of ourselves as to what constitutes intrinsic morality; or rather the more sure each individual of us may be, the more sure somebody else is that he is wrong. What is the conclusion?

We want an Inspector. We do not want a Censor.

Away with the very word Censor, with its tiresome and hateful associations.

Let us have one Inspector-General of all the theatres and music halls in the kingdom. No prosecution shall be started except through and by him. No more than the Censor must he be brought in before production. No more than the Censor must he be allowed to prejudice a performance by stopping it beforehand.

Doubtless it would be advisable in many cases if the Inspector could be brought in beforehand. It is, however, impossible, except in ascertained cases of promised unmistakable indecency. Our safeguard is the fact that no outrageously indecent performance is likely to take place. No manager is going to give a performance of *Eliza taking her bath*. If he does he will be promptly bundled off to prison by the local police. The common law of the land as to indecent exhibitions will remain in force, and can be put in operation. But anything that is not so palpably indecent as to offer no doubt should be left to our Inspector. He cannot, of course, be on the spot; but from any part of Great Britain he can be summoned by telegraph, and can appear in the vast majority of cases before the next performance takes place. He shall be instructed that in no case, or on any pretext, shall he meddle with problems of morality, but only with exhibitions of indecency. In cases of flagrant and unmistakable indecency, he shall have power to stop the performance at his discretion, to collect evidence, and to bring the matter before the

Attorney-General. The Attorney-General shall then decide whether a prosecution shall be instituted, or whether the offenders shall be dismissed with a caution. In all probability the latter will be the usual course that the Attorney-General will take, as it will avoid airing the matter any further in public; the defendants will have suffered loss; and the caution will generally be sufficient.

We are now in the hands of the Attorney-General. So far as the matter is one of political expediency, we are obviously in the right hands; and so far as there may be political reasons for interfering it will be odd if the Attorney-General is not a good enough lawyer to find a sufficient excuse for holding any play over for a time if he thinks it advisable. Of course political expediency cannot pronounce the final verdict, but the scheme does give the government of the day a strong control over the whole matter.

In every theatre and music hall of the kingdom shall be conspicuously placed a large notice giving the Inspector's name, his full address, his telegraphic address, and his telephonic number. Instructions shall be added to the effect that he must not be telegraphed for unless there is an exhibition which is flagrantly indecent. In slighter cases any member of an audience can write full particulars to the Inspector and ask for his intervention. If reasonable cause has been made out in the letter the Inspector will go down and judge for himself. In no case will there be great delay, or any reason to fear any long continuance of an outrageous performance. In most cases, doubtless, the Inspector, having made a personal visit, will not think it necessary to go so far as to stop the performance. He will suggest the omission of undesirable features; he will stop and see this done; he will caution the offenders and threaten them with a prosecution. In many cases the Inspector need not be communicated with at all. Any member of the audience seeing an objectionable feature can threaten

the performer that unless it is altered the Inspector will be summoned. And this will probably be sufficient in the overwhelming majority of cases. At all points on the down grade from indelicacy to downright indecency, a stronger and stronger brake can be applied according to the emergency.

The Inspector shall be instructed not to loiter inactively until he is called upon, but constantly to pay visits all round, and especially to such theatres and halls as he might think likely to contain offenders. When a case is carried to a prosecution, that prosecution should be made very severe, and no mercy should be shown to the offenders; so that it may be clearly understood from the beginning that there shall be no trifling. The fact that there is an alert man in office whose business it is to keep order, will soon stop the worst offences. Indeed they will most rarely occur.

Let theatres and music halls alike be given one licence and placed under the Inspector-General, who can have one or two assistants if it is found necessary.

Let plays be legalized in music halls at once; plays of all lengths. The thirty-minutes sketch must inevitably be licensed forthwith. Mr. Cecil Raleigh estimates that one hundred and fifty thousand illegal performances are given every year. Surely law-breaking cannot be permitted to go on, and grow on, at this prodigious rate. The sketches must be legalized at once.

It will be wise at once also to legalize plays of all lengths in all music halls. Any delay in doing this merely means future agitation, future law-breaking, progressive lengthening of the legal sketch, with a sure victory in the end to the music-hall managers. I counsel the music hall managers to agitate till it is legal to perform *Hamlet* and *The School for Scandal* in every music-hall in the kingdom. If fifty full-length plays were produced in fifty variety theatres next week, how many prosecutions would take place? Not one.

It is true that full-length plays will not often be played in music halls, but there should be the right to play them if the people wish to have them. There is nothing criminal in a man seeing *Hamlet* and smoking a pipe. Any one who prevents him from doing so if he wishes, merely condemns him to listen to Mr. Slangwheezy, Mr. Smallfilth, and Mr. Bawlrot in place of Shakespeare. Already some playgoers are too much inclined to listen to these gentlemen. Let us hope that one of the results of this inquiry will be to free large numbers of them, and especially those of the poorer classes, from the necessity of listening to Mr. Smallfilth, and watching Mr. Leerit while they are smoking their evening pipe. If, however, general assent cannot at present be gained for the legalization of full-length plays at music halls, let the play or sketch of one hour be legalized for the time being. This will, however, introduce confusion, and keep in disorder a matter that will have to be finally settled in a very short time. The music-hall managers have only to arrange amongst themselves gradually to stretch the limit of the sketch, as indeed many of them are now doing, and in a short time full-length plays will be as allowable in music halls as sketches are now.

Our difficulties now seem to have disappeared. One enormous difficulty of the Censorship has been removed. There is now no question as to whether sketches shall be licensed, with all its attendant complications. For if music-hall sketches are not to be licensed, what necessity can there be for licensing a play at His Majesty's? And if the sketches are to be licensed, then why not the dances and all the other items of the entertainment, items that may be far more harmful and immoral than the sketch? Either way there is a dilemma, and no escape from it, except by a temporary shift. We are now clear from that tangle, for all plays, entertainments, and dances, whether at theatres or music halls, will be under one purview. Of course all will depend upon the

man who is chosen as Inspector, as it does in many other equally important posts in public life where necessarily everything hangs upon the character and discretion of the man chosen. It will be a thousand pities if we do not capture something like the right man at the start. He ought not to be costly. The English people had the services of Matthew Arnold in a drudging round for, I believe, less than a thousand a year. And how splendidly and cheerfully those services were performed!

I hope it will not be long before we see in large letters as we enter any theatre or music hall in the kingdom a tasteful playcard announcing:

The Inspector-General of Theatres and Music Halls is—

MR. WISEMAN SHARP,
On the top floor,
Broadview House,
Government Walk,
London.

And then will follow the grounds on which he can be communicated with, or, if necessary, summoned.

We are partly safeguarded against the production of any very disreputable play by the fact that it costs some amount of money to produce it, and that a theatre has to be obtained. A considerable number of accomplices have to be engaged in the matter. With regard to the plays recently vetoed by the Censor it has generally been the Stage Society that has backed and produced them.

Now it cannot be supposed that the Stage Society, numbering amongst its members Lord Gifford, Lord Dudley, Sir Hugh Bell, Sir Almeric FitzRoy, Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, Mr. Cecil M. Chapman, Mr. Sidney Colvin, and many others of like standing, has been organized for the purpose of spending a considerable amount of money to corrupt English morals. In this connection

a loud word of gratitude and recognition is due to Mr. Grein, who did most valuable pioneer work of this kind before the Stage Society existed. And all the more honour is due to him inasmuch as, I believe, he was not backed and financed by a Society, but spent and lost a great of his own money in the labour. This should always be remembered, and we may here put up a little tablet gratefully recording our appreciation of Mr. Grein and the Independent Theatre.

Some such body as the Stage Society will have to be responsible for the future production of those plays which, while not likely to be suitable to the general public, do yet make an appeal to a number of cultivated playgoers of good standing and high tastes. The Stage Society is already well organized and firmly established with an honourable record. That is a sufficient guarantee that nothing very disreputable will be produced. We could not leave this part of the business in better hands than those of Mr. Whelen and the fifteen hundred members of the Stage Society, with dozens of men like those I have named amongst them.

As for the general improvement in our theatre-going tastes and manners, we must look forward to the establishment of a National Theatre, which we hope will raise our standards all round.

To conclude. I claim that I have established :

- (1) That the present, and any proposed, form of Censorship is not only futile, vexatious, obstructive, and obsolete; but that it actually tends to promote indecency and immorality, inasmuch as it throws the Government cloak over certain of their most insidious forms which can never be brought to the view or knowledge of any Censor.
- (2) That this is primarily a question for playgoers to settle, and that they have not been heard before your Committee. That whatever temporary shifts or expedients may now be

adopted, it must finally be settled in accord with the interests, wishes, and convenience of playgoers; and not in accord with the exigencies and vested interests of those who wish to shelter under the government cloak.

- (3) That it is fundamentally a religious question, seeing that the Censorship actually protects certain rank forms of indecency. That ministers and religious people may be asked to take it up, and make a vigorous and continued inquiry on the grounds I have indicated in the previous pages.
- (4) That the appointment of an Inspector-General, such as I have suggested, gives the public security where they have a right to ask for security, and where it can be ensured them, that is, in matters of indecency; while it takes from them the false and wrong security that the Censorship pretends to give them; that is, in matters of morality, where they cannot be really protected, and where it is of the highest importance that they should protect themselves. That the appointment of such an Inspector-General is not at all revolutionary, but is wholly on the side of law, order, decency, and religion.

I have trespassed too long on your patience and consideration. I have been obliged to treat the matter at what must seem to be quite unnecessary length to you and your Committee, who have already, perhaps, heard too much of it. But I was most anxious not to lose a point that might convince you, and I was also most anxious to convince that wider circle who are interested in the matter; and who could not judge it unless they had before them a complete summary of all the leading facts and issues. If I have been betrayed into using expressions of too great warmth and vehemence,

I hope you will put them aside, and not let my bad advocacy prejudice my good cause.

With all submission, sir, to your better judgment, and the judgment of your Committee,

I am,

Your obedient servant,

HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

XX

AFTER THE CENSORSHIP COMMITTEE

November, 1912.

MR. MAX REINHARDT'S latest production has been refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain's Office; that is to say, the public is not to be allowed the chance of judging whether Mr. Max Reinhardt has deliberately risked his high reputation by providing an indecent spectacle.

Undoubtedly some of the dancing seen on the English stage may be challenged on the ground of indecency. The question of the indecency of a spectacle is one that is tolerably easy to settle, and is altogether apart from the very difficult question of the intrinsic morality and tendency of a play. The distinction has been exhaustively pointed out in the previous paper. Very loud complaints have recently been heard of the indecency of the dancing at some fashionable West End Theatres. Their prevalence has proved the incapacity of the Lord Chamberlain's office when it does not interfere. It may be that the refusal of the licence to Mr. Max Reinhardt's production will equally prove the incapacity of the Lord Chamberlain's office when it does interfere.

Meantime, by way of getting a fair idea of the competency of the Censorship to judge any question of indecency or immorality, let us rapidly glance at what has happened since the sittings of the Censorship Committee in the autumn of 1909. It will be remembered

that the Report of the committee, to Parliament advised that the office in its present form should be abolished.

However, the Report has been shelved and its very strong recommendations have been unheeded. Meantime, the Lord Chamberlain's office has managed to hold on to its arbitrary and irresponsible powers, and indeed to augment them.

The Censorship in the opinion of many of our West End Managers is a benevolent institution which prevents them from producing immoral plays. Whether they distrust their judgment, or whether they suspect their inclinations, it is for them to say.

The Censorship is in the opinion of many playgoers a wise benevolent institution which prevents them from seeing immoral plays. Again, whether they distrust their judgment or whether they suspect their inclinations, it is for them to say.

But clearly it is of the first importance to the Censorship to prove by its actions that it is this wise benevolent institution; that it does keep in check this alleged tendency of West End managers to produce immoral plays, and of playgoers to visit them. But, as the evidence tendered to the Censorship Committee amply showed, the Censorship is very far from being this wise benevolent institution. The least then that it can do is to preserve some little outward show or pose of being wise and benevolent, so as to give managers and playgoers an excuse for their pious confidence.

Well, an outcry is raised against the Censorship; a parliamentary committee is appointed; it is proved up to the hilt that the Censorship must at the best be a quite insufficient and ineffective guardian of morality in the theatre; that under the present system it has been indirectly a protector of some of the most insidious forms of immorality; that it is often a stupid and malignant enemy to the highest forms of drama; that

its mistakes and misjudgments have turned the whole affair into a burlesque. The committee recommend such radical changes as amount to an abolition of the office in its present form.

How does this Censorship meet this attack? Having been called to account as the appointed guardian of morality in the theatre, what reply does the Censorship make?

On the stage we often meet with a baffling inadequacy and confusion of motive. But surely not even one of our recent masterpieces of advanced modern drama has been so strangely "motived," or so disdainful of consistent sequence, as the actions and decrees of the Lord Chamberlain's office following on the report of the Censorship Committee.

One of the first plays that came up for judgment was Oscar Wilde's *Salome* with music by Strauss.

Now it has been constantly and abundantly shown that the licensing of a play does not depend upon its morality or immorality, but upon the question whether or not any considerable and influential body of playgoers want to see it. A moment's reflection on the matter will convince the Censorship that this is the invariable rule which guides its final decisions.

Do a small number of intellectual playgoers wish to see Sophocles, Shelley, Ibsen, Maeterlinck? They can be safely defied. The licence may be refused.

Do a large number of careless and thoughtless amusement-seekers wish to see some farrago of nasty nonsense? They cannot be defied. The licence must be given at once.

It might have been foreseen that *Salome* would have to be licensed sooner or later, because like *Samson and Delilah* there was a sufficient number of playgoers who wanted to see it. But the Censorship, always on the look-out for a chance to stultify itself, refused the licence, only to grant it in a few months. If it was immoral in 1911, how could it become moral in 1912?

And why should managers and playgoers be meantime put to annoyance and disappointment? But *Salome* also gave the Censorship a further chance to show the hollowness and futility of its reasons for refusing licences.

We have a favourite way on our English stage of making morality ridiculous, by dodging the risky scenes of a broad French farce so that they grin and wriggle all the more hideously through their transparent English draperies. Apparently it occurred to the Censorship that these dear and familiar subterfuges might be practised on religion. There may have been plausible reasons for not licensing *Salome* at all. But, having licensed the play, what reason could there be for declaring that John the Baptist was not John the Baptist, when every member in the audience knew very well that he was John the Baptist; and moreover was coming to the theatre trebly impressed with the fact that he really was John the Baptist, through having read paragraphs in all the papers announcing the Censor's decision that although he really was John the Baptist, he mustn't say he was John the Baptist, but must go about the stage pretending to be some nondescript and anonymous prophet.

Does the Censorship think that religion is really served by these subterfuges, any more than morality is served by the subterfuges that change a piece of unveiled French indecency into a piece of half-veiled English indecency?

Again, what reason was there for keeping John the Baptist's head out of the charger? Except, indeed, to indicate a mental diathesis on the level of Mr. Dick when dealing with troublesome persons who have had their heads chopped off, and yet will not cease from annoyance?

There was serious comedy in *Salome* and the Censorship; but in the season that followed outrageous farce reigned supreme. During this period it was

difficult to fathom the intentions of the Lord Chamberlain's office ; but so far as motives may be judged from actions, there was an attempt to establish a burlesque system of historical morality in the person of George the Fourth, and a burlesque system of modern morality in the person of "Dear Old Charlie." And historical morality, like all other kinds of morality, having flatly refused to be established by the methods of the Censorship, the Lord Chamberlain's office "scratched Morality" and declared to win with another horse. Disregarding the wise advice of the shrewd old judge—"Never give a reason for your verdict"—the Censorship superfluously issued a note explaining that its real reason for vetoing Mr. Housman's play of *Pains and Penalties* was "because it dealt with a sad historical episode in the life of an unhappy lady" (exact quotation).

We all remember Mark Twain's uncontrollable grief when he found himself at the grave of so near and dear a relative as Adam. The Censor's solicitude for the memory of Queen Caroline offers an even more touching instance of exalted, if unnecessary, devotion and sorrow. It was, however, a little startling to find that the Censor, by the wording of the letter in which his exalted but somewhat belated devotion and sorrow were communicated to the British public, seems to imply that the stern duty of censoring immoral plays incidentally covers and includes the more gallant and pleasing occupation of defending "unhappy ladies." At first sight this duty would appear to belong rather to another branch of the Lord Chamberlain's office, where it is understood that difficulties of precedence and presentation are often the cause of much unhappiness to ladies. But a more careful consideration of the point, leads rather to the opinion that the Censorship, finding itself supported in its claims to absolute sovereignty over the English drama, is about to advance a further claim over a wider, and even yet more unmanageable domain, to enlarge its premises—as it were to open a new department for dealing in a

different class and a larger assortment of human troubles.

One would have thought that the Censorship had already found sufficient difficulty in carrying on its old-established business, especially as it is on the verge of bankruptcy. And at such a juncture to undertake new business of so risky and unremunerative a nature as that of defending "unhappy ladies" would seem to be a most rash and desperate venture.

However, defending "unhappy ladies," though a dangerous and unprofitable, is yet a fascinating and dashing humanitarian pursuit. No wonder the Censorship jumped at such a gay diversion from its ordinary routine. One can imagine the entire personnel of the office with radiant faces and brightened eyes, briskly rubbing their hands, and exclaiming; "Ah! well now! This is something like business! Here's a job at last that's worth doing! Let's all take a turn at this, and drop the other silly game!"

And seeing that defending "unhappy ladies" is likely to consume a vast amount of time and energy, it may serve to draw off the activities that have hitherto been employed in censoring Sophocles, Shelley, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck. And if it has really been decided to enlarge the Censor's powers so far as to give him the same plenary and irresponsible jurisdiction over "unhappy ladies" and their would-be assailants, that he now exercises over plays, the arrangement shall have my hearty support.

And to show that I am in earnest I may mention that I happen to be acquainted with no less than five "unhappy ladies" whom I should have been very much tempted to defend on my own account, had not my natural timidity held me back. Moreover, they are ladies whose unhappiness is of that peculiar nature which would render them especially suitable for the tender care and attentions of the Censor. And in this way some sort of relation might be easily argued

between the function of licensing plays and the function of defending "unhappy ladies"; which two apparently incongruous functions the Lord Chamberlain's office seems to claim as concurrent or inter-changeable duties of its own.

And by way of easing our present difficulties, I undertake to forward the addresses of these five "unhappy ladies" by the first post, in return for the withdrawal of the ban from any proscribed play of Ibsen or Maeterlinck. If my very reasonable offer is refused, I can only echo the massive phrase of Peggotty, and say, "I'm gormed!" Indeed at every fresh step the Censorship takes, what can one do except ejaculate, "I'm gormed!" and yet again in a more solemn whisper, "I'm gormed!"

The drolleries of George the Fourth and the "unhappy ladies" being for the time exhausted, the next thing for the Censorship to do was to see what further fun could be got out of the situation. The difficulty was to prevent an anticlimax. This was successfully avoided by turning the Censorship into a limited liability company. Perhaps one should rather say a hierarchy, with one big or presumably controlling Censor, and round him a group of junior Censors, satellites, henchmen, acolytes—one scarcely knows what to name them; so veiled is the nature of their employment, and so doubtful the extent of their powers. They are called, perhaps without intentional irony, "The Advisory Committee." But it seems cruel and satirical to give a body of well-meaning gentlemen this derisive title when advice is of all things the most useless and unnecessary to offer the Censor. In the matter of the intrinsic morality of a play, the advice, that is to say the opinion, of any two, or twenty, or two hundred persons is likely to vary all round the circle, and one opinion is as likely as another to be sustained and justified by the ultimate verdict of the public. The only Advisory Committee that can be of

any service to the Censor, because the only one that has final weight and authority, is that of the playgoing public. We shall see a little later on, however, that useless as this committee may be to the Censor in the matter of advice, they may be of infinite service in helping him to dodge any personal responsibility and in offering everybody in the office a chance to escape from any challenge of public opinion.

Meantime let us take them at their face value, and call them "Honorary Tasters of Morality to British Playgoers." What power any member has to enforce his judgment, if it differs from his fellows, we do not know. And if opinion never differs, what is the use of a committee? What means the hierarchy of the Lord Chamberlain, Censor, junior Censor, and Advisory Committee have of coming to any general decision in a critical case, beyond the impartial and conclusive one of tossing up, we do not know. They are indeed men who would command our vast respect in any other employment—say in solving that other still vexed problem of how many angels can dance on the point of a needle.

It was a little puzzling to find Sir Edward Carson among the Honorary Tasters of Morality. Sir Edward is at once a keen and generous man, lavish of his services in tangled and baffling causes. Perhaps his easy triumphs in his own profession lured him to try his skill in something more adventurous. But experience in the habitually plain and straightforward paths of the law is no guide in threading the giddy mazes of the Censorship. The code of English law is a child's primer compared with the code of English morality as interpreted by the Censorship. Doubtless it was the discovery of this fact that moved Sir Edward to engage his energies in another cause. At any rate, he may be congratulated on being, at the moment of writing, less dubiously and more hopefully employed in Ulster, upon business where friction is less certain to arise.

But in view of the continuance of the present Advisory Committee, or the possible formation of any similar Committee in future, it may be well to look a little closely into its constitution.

During the sittings of the Censorship Committee it was humorously proposed to submit the ultimate licensing of a play to arbitration. In the preceding paper I have sketched the probable result of carrying such a proposal into effect. In place of having one unhappy gentleman engaged in the hopeless task of trying to reconcile his own notions about the intrinsic morality of a play and of its effect upon the public, with the notions of everybody else—in place of one such bewildered creature we should have had three or four. Lovers of English comedy will doubtless blame me for doing my best to deprive them of such a spectacle.

In reconstituting the Lord Chamberlain's office it was doubtless foreseen that arbitration might lead to further disputes and scandals. To avoid these why not choose a committee, none of whose members could be very much concerned to give freedom and influence to the drama, and all of whose members would be in sympathy with the Censorship?

For the first thing that strikes us is that any Advisory Committee must necessarily be a sympathetic and partisan body.

The Lord Chamberlain can only choose advisers from his sympathizers and colleagues. The very large, influential, and expert body of Englishmen of all professions who are hostile to the Censorship are debarred from representation on the committee. For the only possible advice they can offer the Censor is to throw up the whole business as quickly as possible. Let us recall that in the list of Englishmen hostile to Censorship is to be found, with scarcely a notable exception, the name of every famous and honoured living English writer.

Surely that fact ought to carry immense weight with those who have not the time to follow the intricacies of

this question, and to judge it on its merits. Surely no class of men is better able to judge whether we should have a Censor or not than English men of letters ; for as a body they are not open to any charge of partisanship. Surely no class is so well able to advise the Censor on the intrinsic morality of what, when it is offered to his judgment, is not a play, but a piece of writing. Yet English men of letters are necessarily shut out from his Advisory Committee, for they frankly say to him, " We who from our training and knowledge are best able to advise you, decline to do so, because as all past experience teaches, and as Milton showed nearly three hundred years ago, all arbitrary individual judgments are liable to be mistaken, and in the end to damage the cause of morality rather than to guard it. It is a matter that must be left to the public." That is what English literature is constantly saying to the Censor. Is it to carry no weight ?

And not only are Englishmen of letters shut out from the Advisory Committee, but so also are those influential men in other professions who are associated in condemnation of the Censorship. Therefore, the decisions of the present or of any future Advisory Committee can have no weight ; because they are necessarily the views of men virtually pledged to keep the Censorship going.

It will be pointed out that on the Advisory Committee are to be found the names of Sir Squire Bancroft and Sir John Hare, men whose long and honourable careers as managers may be supposed to give them a voice in the matter. It must be replied that though two managers are to be found on the committee, there is not a single dramatic author.

Was a place on the Advisory Committee offered to any dramatic author ? If it were not, that is a very severe comment on the way the committee was formed. Was a place offered and refused ? That is an equally severe comment.

Let us inquire what are the respective claims of a theatrical manager and a dramatist to appear in this matter; from what point of view each of them is likely to approach its consideration; and what is therefore likely to be the comparative value of their respective opinions.

What is the point at issue? What is the desired and desirable goal which we are labouring to attain? It is this. How can we amidst this great British public, containing large and influential masses still moved by antiquated prejudices against the drama, and mainly ignorant of everything belonging to it; containing other large and half-educated masses moved only by a desire for cheap sensational, sentimental, or sensual entertainment; containing a great majority of all classes resolved to maintain only an outward and superficial show of convenient morality; beset as we are by a multitude of conflicting personal aims and views and notions—how can we, in such encompassing and with only such material to work upon, stir and give free play to those latent and gathering forces which make for an intellectual national drama, a drama whose morality shall be intrinsic, penetrating, compulsive, and not merely conventional, cynical, inoperative? That is the task before us.

What is the best calculated to develop and establish such a drama? What will best tend to promote its permanent interests? That is the question as it presents itself to the dramatist.

Now the London manager with a theatre costing him a thousand or twelve hundred pounds a week to keep going can scarcely be expected to approach the matter from that standpoint. I do not say that we have not managers who may not allow such considerations to have weight with them. But such considerations are not, and cannot be, primary and habitual with a theatrical manager. His first cry will be for a Censor, who will fix a Court or Government stamp on what he produces, and warrant the entertainment to the

public. This Court or Government stamp is very valuable to the manager, for it assures the public of the sound morality of the entertainment offered at his theatre, and tends to protect him from any freakish panic. And the public is lulled into a vicious security and is saved the trouble of looking into the matter for themselves—with what damaging results to morality I have already shown in my letter to Mr. Herbert Samuel on the Censorship Muddle.

It is therefore natural that theatrical managers should cling to the Censorship.

And how far this motive guides them may be seen by what happened upon the issue of the Report of the Censorship Committee. Overwhelming evidence had been brought of the mischievous and capricious ineptitude of the office; the Parliamentary Committee had thoroughly examined the matter and had pronounced for its virtual suppression.

What was the first action of our leading managers? They issued a joint letter, expressing their continued faith in the Censorship and calling for its retention with the present arbitrary powers. Nor apparently has their confidence been shaken by the astounding pranks and blunders which I have glanced at above.

Sir Herbert Tree is of opinion that the present manager of His Majesty's Theatre is not a fit person to decide finally what plays shall be there offered to the public. I have vainly tried to persuade him otherwise. Sir Herbert may be right in his opinion. But Sir Herbert must surely allow that he is likely to be a better judge of an immoral play than the Censors who have vetoed *Œdipus* and *Monna Vanna*, and licensed countless indecent French farces.

The present attitude of West End Managers establishes the fact that they very naturally approach the question of the Censorship from the point of view of theatrical expediciencies and exigencies, and not from the point of view of the interests of the drama. This clash

of interests and consequent divergence of opinion is clearly shown in reading the list of those who are favourable and those who are hostile to the Censorship. In one list are to be found the names of nearly all our managers; in the other the names of nearly all English playwrights with claims to serious consideration. The truth is that the interests and aims of the English drama and the interests and aims of the English theatre, are in many ways divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed. At first sight the fact that our leading managers are in favour of the Censorship would naturally carry weight with the public. But when the reasons which move them to their advocacy are balanced against the reasons which move men of letters and dramatists to take the opposing side, it will be found that the real issue is whether or not the permanent interests of English drama and literature shall be sacrificed to the temporary interests and exigencies of the English theatre. And where the interests of the drama and literature are in conflict with the interests of the theatre we may naturally expect the manager to uphold the interests of the theatre.

But his verdict must necessarily be a partisan one; and this should be borne in mind in estimating the value of the testimony of our leading managers to the beneficence of the Censorship.

It may be urged that dramatists are equally inclined to take a partisan view. But the dramatist has no immediate pecuniary benefit to gain by suppressing the Censor; he is fighting for freedom to practice his profession or business under the same conditions that every other profession or business is practised in this country; that is by the sanction and approval of the public, and not by the permission of a Court official with necessarily confused ideas and irresponsible authority. This is surely a matter which concerns the dramatist very vitally and directly; while it concerns the theatrical manager only secondarily and incidentally. †The fact

then that many of our oldest London managers support the Censorship, which at first sight seems so weighty an argument for its retention, is thus seen to be of little account when placed in the scale against the practically unanimous verdict of English dramatists and men of letters.

I cannot but think that the views of the older managers are mistaken and shortsighted; and that the more broad-minded of them will ultimately look at the matter from the standpoint of the permanent interests of the drama, and not exclusively from the standpoint of the policy of the theatre.

In any case the advent of three or four additional minor Censors can only three or four times multiply the confusions and absurdities of the office. The reasons I have given at great length in "The Censorship Muddle" against the employment of arbitrators are largely applicable to the employment of minor Censors, or of any kind of honorary tasters.

Having thus seen that an Advisory Committee can be of use only to give the public an impression that the Censorship is a beneficent institution looking after their morality, let us see how the establishment of this committee is working in actual practice.

A few months ago an unlicensed play was performed in public before a nonpaying audience, and was favourably received by that audience, and was favourably noticed by leading London and provincial papers. The author sent it to the Lord Chamberlain's office, to get it duly licensed for performance at a regular theatre before a paying audience, at the same time enclosing the fee for reading.

The Lord Chamberlain's office accepted the fee, and said that the licence, if granted, should be forwarded to the manager of the theatre where it had been arranged that the play should be performed. The author was notified from the theatre that the licence had been refused, and that the play could not be performed.

Paragraphs in the London papers announced that the licence had been refused. . . . On the following day the Lord Chamberlain's office denied in the papers that the licence had been refused, and said that it had been informed by the manager of the theatre that the play had been withdrawn. "There was no question of licensing it, or not licensing it. We have not even read it," said the Lord Chamberlain's office. "No licence has been refused for this play."

The author applied to the Lord Chamberlain's office for an explanation of the discrepancy, and was written by one of the Censors that "presumably" the play had gone before the Advisory Board, that "presumably" they had come to the conclusion that it would be inexpedient to licence the play for public performance (it had already been performed in public), and that "presumably" they had advised the Lord Chamberlain accordingly. From this astonishing communication it would appear that the Lord Chamberlain and his appointed Censors have now shifted their entire authority and responsibility to the Advisory Committee, and frankly declare that they have washed their hands of the whole business; for they own they do not even know exactly what happens to a play when it is sent in to them for licence; but that they can only presume what has become of it.

In the meantime, however, they will pocket the guinea, and the author may be left to guess whether or not his play is licensed.

It is one of the hundred absurdities of the Censorship, that the Lord Chamberlain being appointed to stop the performance of any play that he may consider objectionable, has no power whatever to do so. Any society of playgoers can produce any play, provided only that they do not take money for the performance. If no society is ready to undertake the production, a society can be formed with a small subscription to cover the expenses of performance,

and the Lord Chamberlain and all his hierarchy can be ignored or defied. The Lord Chamberlain can, however, withdraw the licence of the theatre producing such a play. The Lord Chamberlain's office is therefore in a position to threaten a manager, and without actually refusing to licence a play, is able to terrorize him from producing it, and to escape responsibility.

Now it is one of the minor hardships of the Censor's lot that at every step he takes he is compelled to prove that he and his office are either superfluous on the one hand, or mischievous on the other. If the Censor does not occasionally veto a play he proves himself to be superfluous; so the time comes round when somebody has got to be held up as a warning. This is an obvious necessity; if it happens less than once or twice a year the office will soon dwindle out of existence.

When, however, the Censor does veto a play it must necessarily fall into one of two classes. It may be a play that a persistent demand on the part of playgoers will compel him to licence in a few months or a few years, such as *Ædipus* and many other standard plays. When sooner or later he has to licence such a play he proves himself to have been superfluous, short-sighted, and interfering with a legitimate demand of the managers and playgoers.

If a play does not fall into that class, it must fall into the class of plays that make no general or permanent appeal to playgoers, and that would naturally soon disappear because of their neglect or disgust.

What happens when the Censor vetoes such a play? Its promoters make a stir, letters are written in all the papers, a prurient curiosity is aroused, a society is formed, the play is produced by subscription, and the Censor's action causes ten times as many people to see what he considers to be an objectionable piece, as would have visited it if he had taken no action at all. In this case he proves himself to have been mischievous. In this eternal predicament of proving himself to be

either superfluous and ridiculous, or mischievous and ridiculous, the Censor is everlastingly placed; while he lives, he cannot escape from it.

The plain course to take is to suppress the Censorship, and to prosecute any one who produces an indecent play by the law of the land, in the same way that all other wrong-doers are prosecuted.

In place of this common-sense proceeding all dramatists, including Sophocles, Shelley, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, are left to be persecuted by the caprices of an irresponsible and unaccountable Censor. And perhaps it is necessary to reaffirm that those who oppose the Censorship do not take that ground because they wish to loosen the safeguards of public morality and decency, but because they wish those safeguards to be upheld by a law that is reasonable and intelligible, and that can be enforced against offenders. I have not read the play in question; I have no knowledge of it. It may be a masterpiece, or it may deserve prosecution by the law of the land. But it has already been performed in public and has received commendation from responsible critics in high-class journals. Let us return to the general question.

Having shown the eternal predicament of the Lord Chamberlain's office in respect both of the present play and of every play that is submitted for licence, let us, in the light of the facts I have brought forward, ask what seems to be the present policy of the Censorship and the Advisory Committee. Apparently, in order to prevent any further inquiry into the present working of the office, it intends to shun all responsibility, to preserve an inaccessible attitude, and if possible, to induce the manager to refuse the piece, so that the onus may be placed upon him. And the power the Lord Chamberlain has of withdrawing the licence from the theatre, renders it likely that the manager in view of his own interests, will be subservient. But if the manager of a theatre is to be forced to take

the responsibility of rejecting a piece, why is he not to be allowed to exercise his unfettered judgment in the first place without the interference of the Censor? The correspondence in the present instance has been placed before me. Reading it carefully it is impossible to say where the responsibility for refusal is to be fixed, under which thimble the pea is to be found. The letters give the impression that the Censorship in wishing to avoid responsibility, is shifting the pea about; now admitting it to be under its own thimble; and before one can be sure it is there, slipping it under the manager's thimble; and then before one can seize it, popping it under the thimble of the Advisory Committee, who apparently have been called in for the sole purpose of shielding the office in its indiscretions. I say that the correspondence gives that impression; and also that if the worst comes to the worst, the pea is to be boldly placed under the managerial table. If I am wrong in taking this view of the matter and of the present policy of the Censorship, will the office give some other explanation of the circumstances I have related? In the absence of such an explanation it must be assumed that I am right. At the moment of writing the matter stands thus:—

A play has been submitted and the reading fee has been accepted, and for some two months the author has been vainly trying to learn from the office whether or not the play has been licensed. Meantime the office pockets the guinea.

Are we to understand that, being placed in an untenable position, the Censorship will for the future evade the responsibility and throw it on the manager who, however much he may wish to produce the play, is naturally disinclined to have his licence taken away, and is therefore compelled by the Lord Chamberlain's office to accept the responsibility, and to announce that he has withdrawn the play?

Meantime the Censorship has seized another

opportunity to stultify its former decisions, and to offer another startling example of the value and quality of its judgments. It has licensed *Ædipus Sophocles*, after having been persistently blackballed, has at length been thought worthy of admission to companionship with the author of the latest musical comedy and the latest dirty farce. A passing shiver must have ruffled the serenity of that august shade as he passed into the erratic orbit of morality whose equilibrium he was at length permitted to disturb. *Ædipus* may well be regarded as an unfit companion in circles where thieves and forgers and swindlers are glorified heroes, and are always politely shown in by the Censor. It will be said that the Censor is concerned with the operation on the stage of the seventh commandment only, and that he has no concern with the eighth. Why not? Why should a distinction be made?

It is a significant fact that the verbal corruption of the term "morality" in English, its annexation to sexual matters alone, has led to an appalling neglect of the plain rules of morality in other spheres of conduct. It seems that a tightening of sexual morality means a loosening of all other kinds of morality. It must be a strange order of mind that can regard *Ædipus* as likely to work an evil effect and therefore to be banned; and at the same time can regard our modern glorified swindler play as likely to be harmless, and therefore to be licensed. Yet the glorified swindler play is always allowed an easy passport to our theatres, and has been in recent years perhaps our most successful type of play both in England and America. It must have wrought immense harm amongst boys and youths about to choose a profession or enter commercial life. If the Censor is supposed to veto plays by measuring the likelihood of their evil effects, surely our glorified swindlers should have come under his ban. Surely our commercial morality stands as much in need of his supervision as our sexual morality. And if it is

manifestly absurd to appoint a Censor to overlook our commercial morality on the stage, is it not as manifestly absurd to appoint a Censor to overlook our sexual morality? And does not every action of the Censorship abundantly prove this absurdity?

However, *Sophocles* has been licensed. Let us be just to the Censor. Let us watch the result. If after the production of *Ædipus*, it is found that Englishmen are developing a habit of marrying their mothers; even if there is any noticeable tendency that way, then the Censorship must be held to have justified itself, and in this instance to have shown a sagacity and foresight which none of its other actions would lead us to imagine it possessed.

Some concessions have lately been made to the demand of the Music Halls for the legalization of their performances of plays. The result is that we see *Othello* and *Hamlet* on the bills of the minor music halls. Why not remove the remaining senseless restrictions?

However, the line of demarcation between theatres and music halls has been broken down, never again to be set up. The inevitable consequence is that they must all be placed under one responsible authority. The Censorship is making claim to this authority, and to jurisdiction over all the music halls and theatres in the kingdom. But this jurisdiction could only be effective if the Censor were daily and nightly present at every performance. For it must be remembered that the Censorship's claim to existence is based on the hypothesis that the public cannot be trusted to judge for themselves, but must have an amusement and morality taster. Now the entertainment in most music halls and many theatres consists largely of spontaneous and impromptu business, gestures, and words that cannot be submitted in writing to the Lord Chamberlain's office. It is therefore impossible that the Censorship should exercise any effective control over music halls. That its pretended jurisdiction is a farce is

proved by the fact that a recent sketch was licensed by the Censor, and was afterwards found to lend itself to the representation of public men and to criticism of their actions. If it is advisable to stop such representations, this clearly shows that it cannot be done in the Censor's office ; but must be left to some such inspection of theatres and music halls as I am advocating.

The whole business is at present in a welter of uncertainty, confusion and contradiction. Without wishing to add to the present perplexities of the Government, English dramatists may ask with growing impatience when the recommendations of the Censorship Committee are to be carried into effect? It is pretty plain that the irresponsible Censor, with omnipotent powers, will have to go. What is needed is a unified authority, responsible to the Government. I venture again to suggest the appointment of an Inspector-General of Theatres and Music Halls as the best way of meeting the very great difficulty, distraction and injustice of the present situation.

In the "Censorship Muddle" I have outlined the scope and duties of such a necessary official. It would be a far more dignified, authoritative, and secure post than that of the present Examiner of Plays ; called upon as he is to reconcile all the discordant notions and interests of authors, managers, playgoers and court circles. If such an inspector is appointed no better occupant for the post could be found than the present Examiner of Plays.

It is pleasant to recognize that, by the very nature of its pretensions, it is the office of Censor, rather than its tenant for the time being, which must be held responsible for the injustices and absurdities that have been committed. As in the case of my late friend Mr. Pigott, I hope I may be allowed to disclaim any personal feeling, except that of sympathy for a man called upon to fill so thankless and unenviable a position. When legislation is taken in hand it will be found necessary to

appoint a man with well-defined powers over such matters, and over such matters only, as can be settled by a responsible decision which can be respected and upheld. The intrinsic morality of a play is not such a matter, and therefore the Censorship is constantly ridiculed and defied, and its judgments revoked and set at naught.

Is it well that an office which is necessarily provocative of continual derision, entanglement, and squabbling should be continued? And continued under the Lord Chamberlain? Does not a farseeing loyalty counsel its immediate suppression? Has not sufficient dignity been already lost?

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