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FREDERICK HENRY KOCH
PIONEER PLAYMAKER

A Brief Biography

By

Samuel Selden

Assisted by Mary Tom Sphangos

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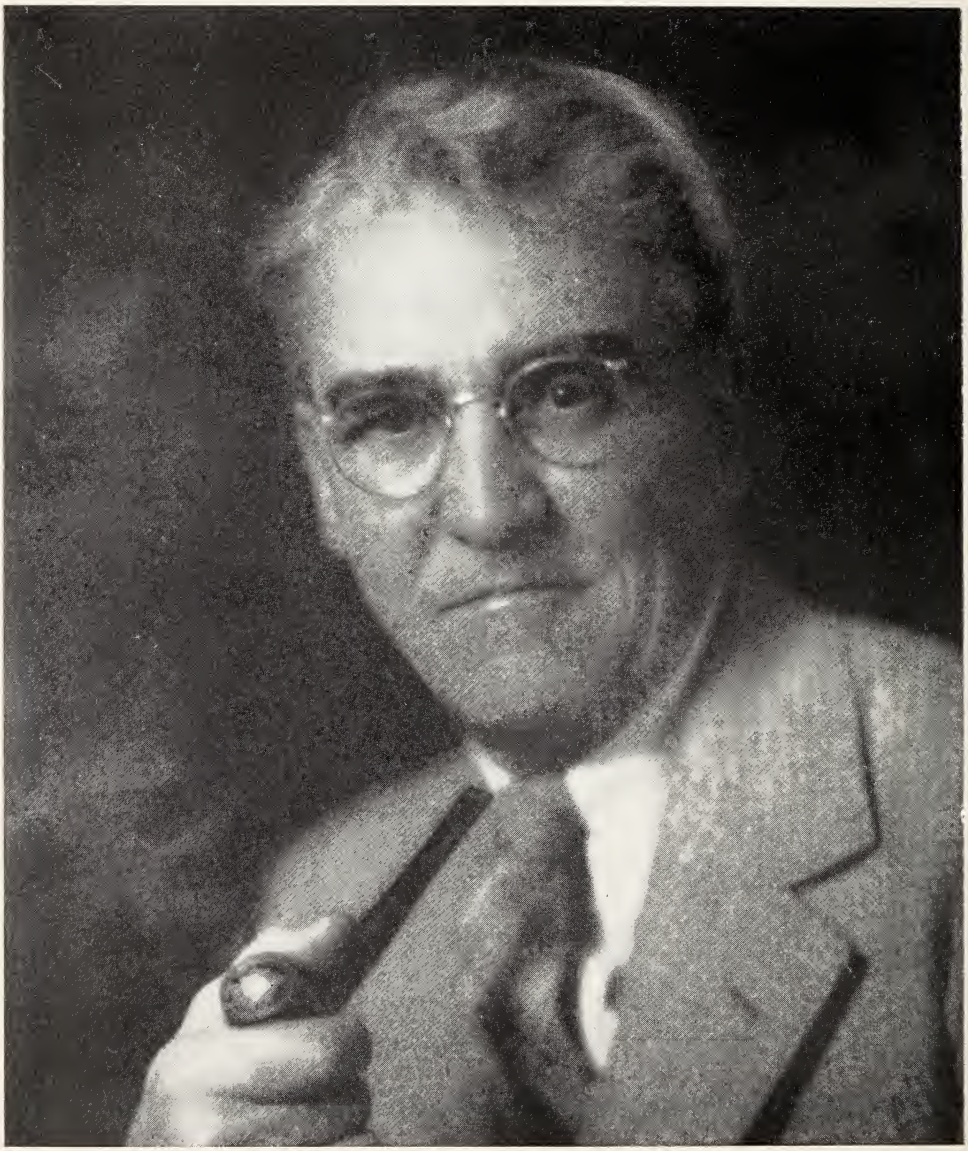
FREDERICK H. KOCH: PIONEER PLAYMAKER

A Brief Biography



FREDERICK HENRY KOCH: PIONEER PLAYMAKER

A Brief Biography

by

SAMUEL SELDEN

and

MARY TOM SPHANGOS

With notes by Jonathan Daniels, George V. Denny, Jr., Elizabeth Lay Green, Paul Green, Hubert C. Heffner, Archibald Henderson and Cornelia S. Love

CHAPEL HILL

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PROLOGUE

By his many associates, both student and faculty, he was known as "Proff" Koch. Through twenty-six years that nickname stood for an individual who was sometimes exasperating but who was always exciting and always lovable. "Proff", that little man in a Norfolk jacket with a big briar pipe and a small dog, Patsy; "Proff" who used to stride across the campus as if he were executing every errand on a direct order of God Almighty; "Proff" with the bright eyes, the quick, kindly smile, and the invariably cheerful "Good Morning!" even on blue Mondays—his memory is etched forever on the minds of boys and girls who have come and gone from Chapel Hill since 1918.

When he was a boy, Proff Koch wanted to be an actor. Because his eminently respectable parents were horrified at that idea, Proff became a teacher. But, although he clothed himself with the gown of academic dignity, he actually had his way, for the position he made and the organization he built around himself were designed and maintained to the end with showmanship. His life was motivated by one desire, to shape his particular part of the world into a play—a play full of laughing young people among whom he would have his role of the grand old man with his pipe and his dog.

Proff was a very busy man. No resident in Chapel Hill ever saw him resting. One of the last glimpses the citizens of the town had of him was as a figure peddling his bicycle down Boundary Street, swishing around the corner and down Franklin faster than any of the laggard automobiles. The doctors had told him solemnly to slow down, but he could not do it. The exertion of energy was ever sweet to him and he could not refrain from using it—in the classroom, on the Playmakers' tours, walking in the woods, playing on the beach. He died when he tried to swim harder than his heart would support him. Thus his career ended in the same posture of action he had held throughout the many years of his rich life.

It was in the cause of the theatre, of course, that the best of his strength was spent. The lights of the stage sparkled in his eyes whether he was reading from Shakespeare, reciting from Anderson, or just talking about the Greeks or the Elizabethans. He loved everything that was associated with acting: portraits and programs, sticks of grease paint, masks and the fine books written by authors and critics. Especially he loved the compositions of hopeful young playwrights.

Those who wish to understand Proff's working philosophy as an individual and as a teacher must recognize three forces that moved in everything he did. The first was his dynamic faith in young people in whom he saw the future of America. Himself, the embodiment of youth with all its enthusiastic optimism and its love of fresh adventure, he was drawn inevitably to the company of those who view life constantly with eyes of hope. The second force in Proff's activity was the belief that every man alive possesses somewhere within him the creative spark, and that this needs only a little tending to be made into a flame. He was never quite satisfied about the size and brilliance of his own blaze; that was a disappointment to him. Somewhere he had failed to learn just the right system of disciplines to make that flame into the burning image he admired. However, he found early that he could inspire others; he could kindle their flames and make them grow. In the warmth of those flames his own life was made happy. Far more than anything he imparted to his students in the way of techniques—he was not a very good maker of rules—was his faith in their capabilities. This led them to accomplishments which were often surprising to them. The list of those who started with little and ended with much is very impressive; it includes many names that have become national figures in the field of writing—dramatists, journalists, novelists, and short-story writers, film and radio authors, historians and biographers.

Proff once remarked: "I believe that when the Good Book says, 'God created man in his own image,' it means that God imparted to man something of His own creativeness, in a sense He made man a co-creator with Him—potentially an artist."

The third drive in Proff was his conviction that the most

dramatic things in life are usually those that are associated with common experiences. Out of this belief developed his long preoccupation with subject matter which he termed "folk." Every man, he observed, is a product of his environment. Every beginning writer, therefore, works most successfully with materials which he sees, not afar off, out of the range of his personal every-day feeling, but near at hand—those which touch him most intimately at every turn of his existence. Since nearly all young Americans are, by training, first regional rather than cosmopolitan in their outlook, they are wise when they focus their first writing on regional subject matter. "A knowledge of the universal," Proff used to say, "springs from an investigation of the specific."

Proff's students were youthful. So was his staff. Through the long years of his teaching at the University there was not among his regular assistants a single full Professor and only one Associate Professor. He never requested the Administration for older men since he was more at home among the younger ones. He held this preference with the full knowledge that young colleagues are apt to be restless, adventuresome and very argumentative. Proff took all these traits among his fellow-workers in stride. As one looks back on the early days of the Department of Dramatic Art and The Carolina Playmakers one cannot help admiring Proff's fine patience. Staff meetings were often tempestuous occasions; but Proff, who used to get the brunt of the questions and most of the challenges, kept his temper under good control. He would smile, smoke his pipe, pat his dog, and if the arguing got to be too involved on one point, deftly turn it into a consideration of something else.

Though Proff was a hard and tireless worker, he was not completely an administrator. Often his interest would get attached to the editing of one of the several play anthologies or the preparation of one of the issues of his beloved Play-Book, and whole areas of other work would be forgotten. As time went on he came to depend more and more on his staff to plan the season's calendar, supervise the production programs, take committee appointments and carry on the routine conferences with students. Through all, however, there was never any question as to the source of the fundamental inspiration and the broad guidance.

The spacious office with the Venetian blinds and red monk's cloth curtains in Murphey Hall was ever the indisputable center of the dramatic organism at Chapel Hill.

During the war years when staff members and students were scattered over the world, Proff's mail was filled with letters from his boys and girls on the battlefronts. Separation had increased their strong affection for him. One young soldier wrote him: "Securely pinned under my left pocket is my Playmaker's mask. Sometimes I reach up and touch it and then my mind flies through the miles to the brown-columned Playmaker Theatre in Chapel Hill. Proff, I swear that little gold mask is magic! It makes me work harder to end this business; it's my own morale builder! It gives me faith and symbolizes what we're fighting for."

Speaking in his playwriting class the last summer, Proff Koch remarked with a characteristic twinkle, "If anybody ever tells you I am dead, don't you believe it! I'll never die." A few days later, on the afternoon of August 16, 1944, his body lay still on a Florida beach. But the spirit of the little man in the Norfolk jacket and with the bright smile lives on. It lives on in the minds and hearts of thousands of former students and associates in every part of the world.

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PART ONE

BIOGRAPHY

I. BOYHOOD

There are two camera portraits of Professor Koch; one shows him at rest with his hair brushed, his pipe held quietly in his hand, unused. His expression, though pleasant, is contemplative and unsmiling. From a photographic viewpoint this is an excellent likeness, and it has become an "official" picture. The other portrait, a more informal one taken in the Forest Theatre in Chapel Hill, shows the Professor as an actor in the role of Mercutio. He stands lightly on his feet with a cape thrown over his shoulder; his sword is out before him and his head is cocked high as if he were about to speak a jest, or taunt a Tybalt. He is smiling. His nostrils are spread as if scenting adventure; the eyes under the wig and decorated hat are twinkling mischievously. This picture lacks some of the dignity of the first print, but it is surely the truer portrait of a man who viewed everything he saw and everything he did as part of an unfolding play.

Frederick Henry Koch was a many-sided person. Some of his complexity was peculiarly individual—it appeared in none of the rest of his family—but some of it derived from his mixed ancestry. In that respect he was very American. His lifelong interest in people of many origins—English Colonial gentlemen, Scotch-Irish mountaineers, Negro farmers, Mexican laborers, Indian plainsmen, Scandanavian pioneers and French Canadian neighbors across the border—sprang from the sense of his own diversified past.

At the time Grandfather Koch and his family arrived in the United States, Peoria, on the Illinois River, was one of the oldest settlements in the Mississippi Valley and Chicago was still a frontier village in a state that was predominantly agricultural. Situated as it was on the river, Peoria was an important link in the heavily-traveled waterway that extended from the Gulf to the Great Lakes. August William Koch was born in Germany on April 30, 1852 and came to the United States with his parents

when he was five years old. His father, Heinrich, who had been a landscape gardener on the estate of a Bremen banker, emigrated to the United States in 1858, and five years later he received his American citizenship papers. Although he was an artisan in his native Germany, Heinrich became a storekeeper in America. His son, August William, worked as an accountant until he became cashier at the Aetna Life Insurance Company where he remained for thirty-two years.

An artistic, methodical and ingenious man, August, when only twenty-three years old, was granted patents on an adjustable desk and shelf brackets. In his off hours, he was a freehand artist who painted skillful reproductions of statues and portraits. He was attracted especially to the graceful appearance and motion of horses, and devoted many hours to sketching these beautiful animals.

On one of his trips to the South, August met Rebecca Julian, daughter of a wealthy Mississippi planter of French Huguenot ancestry. Her family had been prominently connected with the Southern Confederacy; the young girl had grown up in wealth, surrounded by a thousand slaves. All this she left behind her when she married the young German from the North. She was a warmhearted, talented and friendly girl, but not very well prepared by her training to run a home without servants. She spent a great deal of time chatting gaily over the fence with her Illinois neighbors while the house remained unswept and the preparation for dinner waited in the kitchen.

August and Rebecca spent some time in Covington, Kentucky, then returned to Peoria. They had nine sons and one daughter and to their children they gave their own love of beauty and a feeling for design. Three of the boys became architects; the girl, Metta, was a singer. Only Frederick, born at Covington on September 12, 1877, showed an interest in things theatrical. "When we were all just kids together in the old homestead at 1300 First Avenue," writes brother Carl, "Fred on many occasions did elocution work in plays. He would practice for hours in the upstairs bedroom behind closed doors." Imitating earnestly the style of delivery favored in that period, the boy drilled himself in the speaking of dialogue (taking both parts alternate-

ly), pronouncing each word, savoring its meaning, strengthening and polishing its tonal quality. Broad, carefully planned gestures accompanied the speech, gestures which indicated meticulously the changes of thought and the flow and ebb of passion.

Frederick often spoke lovingly of his mother who greatly influenced him. She sympathized with his theatrical aspirations, but cautiously, lest her husband discover her encouragement of Frederick's ambitions. The father, violently opposed to smoking, drinking and the theatre, frowned on anything that was banal, tawdry and not respectable. The theatre meant all this to him and he wanted no part of it for himself or for his family. The theatre held an uncertain future; it was risky, and there was not likely to be in it any financial gain. Gentlemen read the law, practiced medicine, entered the business world, but these wandering, half-starved actors, who moved on to a different town each night, could never hope to amount to anything. Though there was no open hostility between father and son, August Koch was horrified at the possibility of a career in the theatre for his son. When in later life Frederick decided definitely to give himself to drama, the father was disappointed, but there was no break in the older man's affection. Letters between the two men show their abiding devotion to each other, a feeling which, in spite of their strong-willed natures, grew deeper through the years.

From his father, Frederick inherited a love of color and line, neatness, orderliness, a liking for careful, painstaking composition. This was reflected, in his carefully phrased letters, and especially in the form of all the printed documents which originated in his office. He had a fine eye for typography. Each issue of *The Carolina Play-Book* was a separate work of art. From his greatgrandfather, Heinrich, he drew his fondness for trees and flowers. For Frederick, all growing things were like people; he shared his love of blossoming bushes, beds of roses and the woods behind his home on Glenburnie Street with his affection for dogs and children. The adult Frederick never let himself get too busy to spend at least some time each week working in his garden.

From his French mother Frederick derived his gregariousness and his quick wit. He was a master of repartee. It was always

spontaneous, never studied, never rehearsed. People who noted his solid German name were often intrigued by his very French manner and commented on it. From his mother, too, Frederick inherited his taste for unconventionality and for cheerful, flamboyant effects. This was reflected in his dress. In his early years he encircled his collar with a flowing tie. When one of his brothers, meeting him at the train, once made derogatory remarks about this affectation, Frederick changed to more conservative neckwear, but until his death his favorite shirts were tinged with lavender.

II. THE DAKOTA YEARS

After graduating at seventeen from Peoria High School, Frederick went to Caterals Methodist College in Cincinnati, then to Ohio Wesleyan University for his bachelor's degree. He was graduated in 1900, and five years later secured an appointment as an instructor in English at the University of North Dakota.

At this time the state was still a young one. It had been admitted to the Union in 1889, just sixteen years before the young teacher's coming. North Dakota, fast-growing and vigorous, was eager to take a recognized place with her neighbors to the East and South, but not to imitate their culture. From the beginning she remained individual, strengthened, oddly enough, by the heterogeneity of her people: Norwegians, Russians, Germans, Canadians and Swedes. These people often lived on isolated farms, but their outstanding characteristics were a ready willingness to help a neighbor in need, and an equal willingness to rejoice in a neighbor's good fortune.

The settlers enriched the character of their State by preserving the best of their old-world customs, both social and religious. They possessed a love for the good earth, and strong bodies to bear the heavy strain of bringing that soil to productiveness. Industriousness and frugality coupled with a love for drama and music, carried over from their European background, were quali-

ties that were characteristic of these new citizens. With such cultural attributes, students, many of them first-generation Americans, offered colorful material for the dramatic experiments of Frederick Henry Koch.

When the new instructor of English came to the University, there was no theatre on the campus. The only available stage was that of the local "Metropolitan Opera House." But the students were interested and eager to learn, and instructor Koch eager to teach them. Their first production was Sheridan's *The Rivals,* which was followed by other classics and semi-classics written by Charles Dickens, James Sheridan Knowles, Clyde Fitch, James M. Barrie, as well as William Shakespeare.

From the beginning, interest in the drama grew rapidly, not only at the University but also over the state. At the end of his first year, Mr. Koch organized the first of many tours across North Dakota. He took his group of student actors in *The Rivals* on the road, from Grand Forks on the eastern border to Minot on the west, traveling eight hundred miles to show their play in seven cities and towns.

The beginnings were auspicious, but Frederick felt he needed more training. For this reason he decided to return to school. He went to Harvard for a Master's Degree (which he obtained in 1909), concentrating on dramatic literature, then to Emerson College of Oratory in Boston, where he studied elocution with the famous teacher, Charles Wesley Emerson. One of Emerson's courses, the Philosophy of Gesture, is described in an early publication of the college as: "Educating the body to spontaneously express in a beautiful way the highest sentiments of the soul." The school's program consisted of "A complete system of Physical Training and Voice Culture, a new method of analysis, Natural Rendering Gesture, and the principles of the New Philosophy of Expression . . . thoroughly taught." All of this produced a great effect on the ambitious and impressionable young man from North Dakota.

The most important influence on Frederick during those months in Cambridge and Boston, however, came not from any school but from a man—George Pierce Baker. Koch fell immediately under his spell, and for some years after he left Har-

vard the youthful instructor imitated the older man's classroom manner and dress. Early students remember the pince-nez and the heavy black ribbon, and the many proud references to the illustrious teacher in the east.

From Professor Baker, Mr. Koch got his interest in the new movements in playwriting abroad—the work of Otto Brahm in Germany, of André Antoine in Paris, and especially of Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge in Ireland. In these authors' use of the earthy materials, the legends and folklore of their native land, he saw a stimulating challenge for similar writing in North Dakota. He was impressed by the competent dramaturgy exhibited by the young men and women in Professor Baker's playwriting course. This gave him confidence that amateurs in the Midwest also could compose dramas if they looked about them keenly enough, and exerted their powers of imagination.

After his graduation from Harvard, Frederick took an extended trip abroad, where he studied the sculptural and architectural art of the Greeks and Romans, traveled in North Africa and Syria, sailed up the Nile, and visited Jerusalem. During the course of one of his journeys he met a pretty girl of Irish descent, Loretta Jean Hanigan, who at the age of eighteen was taking a trip around the world with her brother, her sister and her father, a Denver business man. She later said of the meeting:

> At a hotel in Athens, Greece, I met a good-looking, black haired, dark-eyed young man. He was on a leave of absence from the University of North Dakota for a trip through Egypt, Greece and many European countries. On the Acropolis, three days after I met him, he asked me to marry him. That was my beloved "Proff!" He joined our party and we traveled through Europe for four months—then he returned to his North Dakota work and I remained in England for eight months.

They were married on March 24, 1910, in Denver and during the next eight years "Jeanie" assisted Frederick with his work at Grand Forks. She never liked the long cold winters there, however; she was glad when an opportunity came later to move to a warmer climate.

When he resumed his work at the University, Mr. Koch re-

turned to the production of plays he admired: *Twelfth Night, Everyman,* Clyde Fitch's *Nathan Hale,* and Barrie's *The Professor's Love Story.* In 1913 he turned to his new friends, the Irish dramatists, and presented Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News,* Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Yeats's *The Hour Glass.* Three years later, after an interlude of Ibsen and Shaw, he introduced to the campus Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Rising of the Moon* and Yeats's *A Pot of Broth.* In these Irish works he found inspiration for experiments in original American writing. The first of these, like *A Pageant of the North-West,* were communal enterprises in which groups of students worked together. Drawn from historic and legendary materials concerned with the exploration and conquest of the Northwest Territory, it was written by eighteen under-graduates under Professor Koch's direction.

The success of the group projects gave courage to the teacher and his students to undertake adventures in solo composition. On December 19, 1916, the First Series of original plays by single authors in the recently formed Sock and Buskin Society was presented in Woodworth Auditorium. The bill included

Turribly Sot by Clara Struble
A Comedy of New England Life
The Long Exile by Arthur Cloetingh
A Tale of Russian Prisoners in Siberia

The Second Series, performed in January of the following year had four plays, one a "repeat:"

Wanted—A Farmer by Melvin Johnson
A Comedy of Farmers in Chicago
Becca by Agnes O'Connor
An Adaptation of Kipling's Story, "Lispeth"
Turribly Sot by Clara Struble
A Comedy of New England Life
Are You Guilty? by Arthur Cloetingh
A Satire on College Life

Those early efforts were enthusiastically received, playing to crowded houses at every performance. Newspapers called them "valuable contributions," stated "Original Plays Are Excellent," and "Gradually, the organization is reaching its goal . . . the

creation of a North Dakota drama that will play an integral part in the drama of the country."

The year 1917 was a busy one at Grand Forks. In February, the Society put on four new plays, in March three more, and in the following December, one. Five were presented in February, 1918, and three in April. Most of the works, both the dramas and the comedies, were written out of the personal experience and observation of the boys and girls who made them. Their subjects included college people, mountaineers, Alaskan pioneers, country boys, lonely sheep-herders. The plays were not very finished products, but they were honest and they were filled with the enthusiasm of the authors. This honesty and this enthusiasm gave them a form of dramatic life which affected all who saw them.

Typical of the prairie plays was *Barley Beards*, by Howard De Long, who was born of French homesteaders in a sod shanty forty miles from the railroad. The action of the play was centered in an I.W.W. riot in a North Dakota threshing crew and was based on De Long's own experiences on a wheat farm at harvest time. Typical also was *Me an' Bill*, by Ben Sherman of Judith Basin, Montana, dealing with the tragedy of a "loony" sheep-herder well known to the playwright. The shepherd's love of his lonely life on the great plains was expressed in his words:

> You are out there on the plains, under the blue sky, with the soft winds a-singin' songs to you. Free—God, but you're free! You get up in the morning to meet the sun; you throw out your arms, breathe into your lungs life; and it makes you live—it makes you live! It is the same feelin' He had. He wanted to live for His sheep.

There is a distant kinship between this man and O'Neill's Ephraim Cabot in *Desire Under the Elms*.

The organization which sponsored all this activity had no room for idle philosophers. Every member had either to perform or to write. William Whitford, in a booklet entitled *The Sock and Buskin Society*, describes the association as follows:

> As first organized the society was composed of thirty active members, fifteen from the faculty and fifteen from the student body, but owing

> to the unusual interest shown the membership was later increased to forty. In order to become a member of the society, the candidate must pass one of two tests—he must either write an acceptable piece of dramatic criticism or he must present, to the satisfaction of the membership committee, a scene from dramatic literature. In this way two types of members are secured—first, those of critical ability and second, those of histrionic talent. The success of the society, both in its private and public performances, is due to the co-operation of its two kinds of members.

One of the charter members of the band was Maxwell Anderson, later to become the author of *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Mary of Scotland*, *Winterset*, and many other plays.

On December 7, 1917, the eve of the presentation of its Fifth Series of new dramas, the Sock and Buskin Society became "The Dakota Playmakers," a title which the members felt was more appropriate to the kind of work they did. Over the years the idea of *making* had come to overshadow the concept of interpreting.

Following their tradition of touring university productions, Professor Koch and his company of players took their original dramas across the state. Commenting on the performances, the *Dakota News-Bulletin* (April 17, 1917) said:

> The splendid enthusiasm which greeted the amateur actors wherever they went meant more than mere admiration for the work shown on that particular occasion. It was like the spirit which pervades a big family reunion, a consciousness of unanimity, a feeling of kinship, for the people of the soil were welcoming the sons and daughters of their commonwealth in plays that promise not a little . . . toward a new Dakota Drama.

Professor Koch was happy about the growth of his students' labors. For him the idea of an American "folk-drama" was now forming. He expressed his feeling about this in the Introduction to the volume of *Carolina Folk Plays* (First Series) which he edited a few years later (1922):

> Such are the country folk-plays of Dakota—simple plays, sometimes crude, but always near to the good, strong, wind-swept soil. They tell of the long bitter winters in the little sod shanty. But they sing too of the springtime of unflecked sunshine, of the wilderness gay with wild roses, of the fenceless fields welling over with lark

> song. They are plays of the travail and the achievement of a pioneer people.

In the thirteen years since Mr. Koch's arrival in Grand Forks, the development of North Dakota theatre had come a long way. The man who had begun the work was not to be able to finish it, however, for he received a call to go to another state and to other adventures in playmaking.

III. THE CAROLINA PLAYMAKERS

"North Carolina is a poor risk for the sale of plays," reported most of the established publishing houses in the early twenties. And H. L. Mencken, speaking of the entire South in his scathing essay, "The Sahara of the Bozart" (*Prejudices,* 1920) said:

> It is, indeed, amazing to contemplate so vast a vacuity. One thinks of the interstellar spaces, of the colossal reaches of the now mythical ether. . . . If the whole of the late Confederacy were to be engulfed by a tidal wave tomorrow, the effect upon the civilized minority of men in the world would be but little greater than that of a flood on the Yang-tse-kiang. . . . There is not . . . a single opera house, or a single theatre devoted to decent plays.

This statement appeared in 1920. In *North Carolina, A Guide to the Old North State,* prepared by the Federal Writers' Project a few years later (1939), we read:

> Many amateur theatrical societies flourished in North Carolina between 1790 and 1850. . . . After 1850 interest in the drama declined and it was not to revive until Frederick Henry Koch launched The Carolina Playmakers in 1918.

It is interesting to compare these notes with statistics released in 1953 which show that the various dramatic enterprises directed by the University's Department of Dramatic Art drew, in that one year, more people than all the football games, and with an official advertisement which the State Department of Conservation and Development placed in several national magazines that same year. In it a large hand was shown holding a group of

theatre tickets, and above these was displayed in bold type, "The Play's the Thing in North Carolina!"

In its long history of educational activity, the University of the "Old North State" has had many distinguished teachers. One of the wisest and most influential of them was Dr. Edwin Greenlaw who headed the Department of English from 1913 to 1925. He was troubled by the conditions in the South that had been noted by Mencken and other critics, and he was determined to do something about them. Looking about North Carolina he saw that there was an abundance of rich material for writers of every sort, waiting and ready to be used. The conditions and the time were ripe. Dr. Greenlaw had heard of the work initiated by the dynamic young teacher in North Dakota and felt that here was a man who could exploit the latent dramatic resources in the South. After a consultation with President Edward Kidder Graham, he wrote to Professor Koch:

> Those of us who have lived in Chapel Hill are devoted to the place and to the people. I have no doubt you will find it a delightful home. . . . You will have the greatest opportunity to carry out the work that you have developed [at North Dakota]. The foundations have been laid; we need now a man who can devote himself to building on them. You will find warm appreciation of your work and a hearty welcome.

Professor Koch felt reluctant to leave Grand Forks. He had spent nine strenuous years building the work of the Dakota Playmakers which were now just starting to show their strength. North Carolina was far away, a state with which he was unfamiliar; there he would have to start over again from the beginning. However, the opportunities were intriguing. Besides, he could not help thinking of his family. The long icy winters on the unprotected prairie had not been good to Jeanie; she had not been well. He remembered the spot of frost that formed on the wall in the hallway of their house every autumn and did not leave till spring. Besides, there were now two young sons, Fred and George. Professor Koch wrote a letter to Dr. Greenlaw accepting his invitation.

The man from the midwest never regretted his decision to come to Chapel Hill. He fell in love with the place as soon as

he saw it. He liked the wide, shady roads with the roots of the great oaks growing out into the driveway. He liked his neighbors. He liked their flower gardens. He liked the trails through the surrounding woods, and the countryside where he could talk to white and Negro farmers, their old people and their children. He liked the friendly faculty of the University. He enjoyed the informal official meetings to which professors brought their pipes and their dogs—and the affectionate disagreements between the two parliamentarians, Dr. Bullitt and Dr. Booker. ("Now doth the Bulbul sweetly make answer to the Nightingale!") He liked the bright-eyed students on the campus, who, whether they knew one or not, always nodded politely as they passed and murmured "Good morning, sir."

The War was still in progress when in the fall of 1918 Frederick Koch began his teaching. Young men in the uniforms of the Student Army Training Corps were marching up and down in front of the South Building when the new professor was assigned a room upstairs in the old Library, now Hill Music Hall.

When Mr. Koch came he learned that the University offered no formal course in drama, and that only occasionally had a few student groups ventured to produce plays. What Chapel Hill needed besides additional classes in the study of literature, he thought, was one in which students made their own plays. It was with this in mind that he planned his now famous course that was listed in the University Catalogue as:

English 31-32-33 Dramatic Composition.
Credit, 1½ courses.
Three hours a week.
Fall, Winter and Spring Quarters.

A practical course in the writing of original plays. Emphasis is placed on the materials of tradition and folk-lore, and of present-day life. The essentials of stagecraft are illustrated in the production, by The Carolina Playmakers, of selected plays written in the Course. The Course is limited in number.

—Professor Koch.

At first glance the unsuspecting student saw nothing very revolutionary in the catalogue description. Once enrolled, how-

ever, he discovered that there was in store for him a radical departure in classroom teaching. There were no textbooks. A list of representative plays selected from the masters of dramatic literature was handed to him and he was instructed to "read these." And before he could retreat, he was told also that he could—and probably would—write some plays himself. "Impossible!" retorted the student. But he had failed to reckon with the determined teacher who talked incessantly about folk plays and about something called "communal drama," whatever *that* was. In a few weeks the student usually succumbed to the boyish charm of the English professor and found himself reading and writing dramatic scenes along with everyone else.

The only male member of that first playwriting class was a tall mountaineer from Asheville, North Carolina. Trying to explain his presence among the coeds, he told Mr. Koch: "I don't want you to think that this Ladies Aid Society represents Carolina. We have a lot of he-men seriously interested in writing here, but they are all disguised in army uniforms now. I tried to get one myself but they didn't have one long enough for me." This was Thomas Wolfe, whose first shy experiments in the class were to grow through the years into a torrent of writing.

In less than nine months, on March 14, 1919, the first band of student writers had produced their initial bill of experimental one-act plays on a makeshift stage in the Chapel Hill High School, where for the next seven years their performances were to be given. The three plays presented that night were *When Witches Ride,* a play of Carolina folk superstitution by Elizabeth Lay of Raleigh; *The Return of Buck Gavin,* a tragedy of the mountain people by Thomas Wolfe of Asheville (with the author playing the title part); and *What Will Barbara Say?,* a romance of Chapel Hill by Minnie Shepherd Sparrow of Gastonia.

Was it a prophetic note that was expressed in the University of North Carolina *Alumni Review* in 1919?

> The first appearance of The Carolina Playmakers marks an epoch in the history of the University and the State . . . . never before have we had just what the Playmakers gave us . . . . We were not spectators of an imported performance. We were participants, all

> of us, in a translation of our common life into a thing of beauty . . . . This movement is full of promise from the standpoint of literature . . . . It is not too much to hope that not only dramas but also other forms of imaginative literature may spring, to be a source of refreshment and vision for all the people of the State.

Mr. Koch felt that his work was having a good beginning.

English 31 was conducted as a seminar with the students and the professor seated about a long table. In *Carolina Folk-Plays, Second Series,* Professor Koch writes that there were no formal lectures on dramatic technique. "The student is expected to read with alert imagination such plays as will give him a conception of what constitutes good dramatic form. Occasionally a scene is read aloud. But there is no critical analysis of the plays read. Such a process may tend to make the young writer self-conscious —to inhibit his impulse to write."

Mr. Koch continues, explaining his teaching technique in more detail:

> The approach is frankly experimental, and constructive toward sound dramatic expression. The instructor directs the attention of the student to the dramatic happenings in the life with which he is most familiar—to the strange tales of Blackbeard in his home-town of Bath; to the restless lives of the workers in a mill village; to the balladry of sea-faring men on the shifting banks; to the comedy of a sun-tanned country boy; to the bitter hatreds of his own Highland people; to the old plantation homestead he knows, redolent of forgotten romance; to the lonely farm-cabin he has passed day after day, without heeding the living drama it holds; to the "queer" characters in the little town he knows so well—old "Doc" Ickard, the village "hoss doctor", and big Ike O'Neill of the wonderful tales. All these he may weave into plays if he looks with seeing eyes, if he catches the throb of life waiting there to be expressed.
>
> The spirit of the group is communal. The students come to the meetings of the course with vague ideas for plays-in-the-making. Perhaps the boy from the Piedmont section will begin: "I know about a country boy's courtship which ought to make a play. The old man used to stamp on the floor of his bedroom as a signal for the boy to go home. One night the boy—we'll call him 'Lem'—conceived the idea of pretending to leave. He called out to the girl a loud 'good-bye', and banged the outside door. Then after a little he slipped in through the window in his stocking feet to finish saying 'Goodnight.' But the father came in and discovered the trick."

With that beginning as the "vague idea," the students, quick to see the dramatic possibilities of this humorous situation, began to offer their own suggestions to the playwright, as they visualized the possibilities of the new-born comedy. In reconstructing a typical class scene, Professor Koch relates the comments that might have been heard during a meeting of these budding authors, all eager to help each other in plot, characterization or dialogue:

> "That's a good one," someone laughs. "But how did the father happen to come in?"
>
> And another pipes up, "I think you ought to make use of the little brother who is always butting in on the courtship."
>
> "That's good," from the prospective playwright. "The girl had two brothers, and I can work them both in for some good laughs."
>
> Then a rival suitor is added to complicate the situation, and a few days later, when the embryo play comes back to be read to the group, it has the elements of a real plot.
>
> A lively discussion ensues. "The ending is weak." "Why not have the little brother steal Lem's shoes, so he can't make his get-away?"
>
> "That's bully! I'll do it!"
>
> And—with the assistance of one of the co-eds in the course—in phrasing the speeches of the girl—with much re-shaping of the plot, revising the characters, recasting of the dialogue, the comedy of *In Dixon's Kitchen* finally emerges.

In this cooperative manner the plays were written, or as Mr. Koch put it, "mostly rewritten," and the technique proved highly effective. Informality—a requisite for any such group writing—and a friendly rapport between professor and students characterized the classes.

After several new playwrights had read their one-act plays to an interested group of actors and technicians, it was the custom to choose three plays for production and an intense period of three weeks or less was spent in rehearsals. On the evening of the experimental productions, the author, introduced to the audience by Mr. Koch, defended his play, if defense were necessary, and audience participation in the criticism that followed the performance enabled the young author to make a more concrete appraisal of his dramatic effort. Therefore, from the very beginning of his play to its final presentation before an audience

made up of university students and interested citizens, the drama had been in fact communally written, and rewritten. The experience throughout was a rewarding and valuable one for every ambitious writer.

IV. A PEOPLE'S THEATRE

Thomas Wolfe, though he was to write more successfully in the form of the novel, repeatedly gave Mr. Koch credit for stimulating and sustaining his interest in writing in those early days. In a collection of letters, a gift from Mrs. Frederick H. Koch and her son Robert to the University of North Carolina, now preserved in the North Carolina Room of the University Library, one may read from Wolfe's own hurriedly-written pages his expressions of gratitude to Mr. Koch. After he left Carolina, Wolfe continued to write rather regularly, seeking his former instructor's criticism and help, confident of his sympathy and understanding. From Harvard, where he had gone at Mr. Koch's suggestion for further training in Professor George Pierce Baker's famous workshop, Wolfe wrote "There are too many dilettanti in the theatre." He was determined not to be one of them.

Professor Koch was proud of his collection of Wolfe letters. It is said that on occasions, he would single out a promising young student for a secret meeting at which he would read the whole collection, carefully kept in a scrapbook that was later bound in scarlet leather. This scrapbook contains the letters written to Mr. Koch, the original typescript in a notebook marked "English 31, Dramatic Composition," of Wolfe's first play, *The Return of Buck Gavin,* and the contract for the publication of that first play.

Perhaps the most influential member of those early playwriting classes was Paul Green, whose first full-length play, *In Abraham's Bosom,* produced by the Provincetown Players in 1926, was a Pulitzer prize-winner. It is said that it was Green who christened Mr. Koch with the affectionate name of "Proff."

As a graduate student in Philosophy, Green, who had always been more interested in writing short stories or poetry, was profoundly influenced by Mr. Koch. Green says of his early impressions.

> Then in 1918 Proff Koch came riding in from the Dakota prairies, his arms full of plays and his head full of dreams. In no time a stage was set up and everybody near and far, little and big, black and white realized for the first time that he, said body, was an artist of some sort—mainly a dramatic artist—I chose the last. And after a few productions, I was caught fast in my choice and had struck acquaintance with all the bat-like terrors that inhabit the shadows of the stage.

Would Paul Green have become a playwright had it not been for Proff's encouragement? That question has been discussed often by people who have attempted to make a serious study of Green's work. Certainly the fact that the Playmakers were actively engaged in creative writing at the University at the time of Green's return from France after World War I, leads one to believe that his training was distinctly strengthened by Proff's dynamic teaching. In a fine biographical study of Paul Green, begun by Agatha Boyd Adams and finished after her death by Richard Walser, Green's philosophy of playmaking is stated as follows:

> Most of the plays I have written can be designated as folk plays, and I know this seems a narrow boundary. Perhaps it is, but since the "folk" are the people who seem to matter most to me, I have little interest in trying to deal with others who are more foreign and therefore less real to me. Not for a moment do I claim to have done justice to an inspiring subject matter, but the challenge is there, clearer, sharper, more compelling everyday. For there is something in the life of "the people" which seems of deeper significance so far as the nature of the universe goes than the characters who might be termed sophisticated . . . .

One of Green's early plays, written in collaboration with his younger sister, Erma, illustrates the author's point of view. Its subject, tenant farmer life, is "a study of the grinding poverty" . . . which the authors had observed from childhood. "Here," writes Professor Koch in *Carolina Folk-Plays* (Second Series), "The pent-up fury of the work-driven woman, Lilly Robinson,

is portrayed with grim and terrible reality. She craves a little beauty—'purty fixin's.' But her husband's eyes cannot see beyond the sod he plows. The scene is a bare cabin home in Harnett County, but the theme is universal—the pitiful conflict of two natures which are irreconcilable."

Fixin's was taken on tour by The Carolina Playmakers and made a powerful appeal. In one town where it was performed, the editor of *The Smithfield Herald* described in an editorial the audience's reaction:

> *Fixin's* went straight to the hearts of those present. Too many times had that scene been enacted before their eyes in real life. The simple story of the tenant farmer's wife was too true to mean actual enjoyment to the spectators. The scene might just as well have been in Johnston County as in Harnett. It was typical of this, the cotton section of North Carolina.

The Atlanta Constitution was even more enthusiastic (January 25, 1925)

> Never, it would seem, has any stage given us a more perfect gem than *Fixin's*. It gripped the onlooker until the walls of the theatre melted into mist and we lived in the bare shack the Carolina tenant farmer called his home, and we felt our hearts wrung with the tragedy of the life . . . . True folk plays of America, holding, in addition to their present delight, the promise of marvellous things to come . . . . Can't somebody start something like this in Georgia?

Proff Koch believed that there was never a time when a people's theatre would serve a greater need. "People have so much leisure nowadays and they need to use it wisely. By taking active part in the production of art they will gain more in spiritual productiveness than they would in any other way," he said.

Perhaps the first use of the now common term "folk play" in the American theatre, appeared in The Carolina Playmakers' announcement: "Carolina Folk Plays" on the playbill of their initial production in Chapel Hill on March 14, 1919.

Mr. Koch pointed out that the term "folk" as it was used had nothing to do with the folk play of medieval times. "But rather it is concerned with folk subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. For the most part they are

realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic."

Professor Koch amplified his explanation of folk drama in an introduction to the single-volume *Carolina Folk-Plays*:

> The chief concern of the folk dramatist is man's conflict with the forces of nature and his simple pleasure in being alive. The conflict may not be apparent on the surface in the immediate action on the stage. But the ultimate cause of all dramatic action we classify as "folk," whether it be physical or spiritual, may be found in man's desperate struggle for existence and in his enjoyment of the world of nature. The term "folk" with us applies to that form of drama which is earth-rooted in the life of our common humanity.

Actually, Proff's concept came to mean more than this; it embraced everything that was primary in man's experience. Synge, O'Casey, Lynn Riggs, the Sidney Howard of *They Knew What They Wanted* and the O'Neill of the sea plays and *Desire Under the Elms*, Proff included among the world's "folk dramatists." Such authors as Shaw, Coward and Philip Barry—good and important as their playwriting was—he did not include.

Through all of the rest of his life Professor Koch's thinking about the theatre was dominated by his love of the folk. He became almost obsessed by it. He wrote, lectured at the University and travelled around the country talking about it. What gave point to his interest on folk drama was two things: first, his knowledge that American homes, farms and small towns were full of rich materials which writers had as yet (at least in the early years) scarcely discovered; and second, his conviction that here was the best place for the young author to begin to get his subject matter. This was the place to start because here were the familiar things, the things the writer knew best.

The growth and development of The Carolina Playmakers followed a pattern similar to that of The Dakota Playmakers. Once a band of actors was organized, interest sustained, and the writing of plays overflowed onto the stage, the Carolina dramatists felt the need for stating the three-fold purpose of their existence:

> First, to encourage and promote dramatic art, especially by the production and publishing of plays; second, to serve as an experimental theatre for the young playwright seeking to translate into fresh

dramatic forms the traditions and present-day life of the people; and third, to extend their influence in the establishment of a native theatre in other states.

Like the Dakota group, The Carolina Playmakers started early to tour their state and neighboring states with their plays. The first performance away from Chapel Hill was given in the Municipal Theater in Greensboro, North Carolina, on May 7, 1920, when they presented *Off Nag's Head,* by Dougald MacMillan; *The Last of the Lowries,* by Paul Green; *Dod Gast Ye Both!,* by Hubert Heffner; and *In Dixon's Kitchen,* by Wilbur Stout.

Four years later The Playmakers invaded Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. And the following year, 1926, found them packing homemade scenery, costumes, lighting equipment and properties on their Show-Bus, for a tour of Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. On the first trip to Washington, they received an invitation from President Coolidge to visit the White House and Coolidge is said to have remarked, with characteristic understatement, that the work of The Carolina Playmakers was "very interesting."

V. "PAGEANT-DRAMA"

When the plans were laid for Frederick Koch's coming to North Carolina in 1918, the University, under the guidance of Dr. Greenlaw, prepared for his advent with a good sense of academic showmanship. That year was the tercentenary of Sir Walter Raleigh's death in England. Sir Walter was the organizer of the first British colony in the New World, and its settlement belonged to North Carolina: Raleigh was a pioneer. What would be more fitting than to cast the pioneer of playmaking from the west in the role of Raleigh's dramatic celebrant and have him make his entrance into the state as an author of a play about Raleigh! Mr. Koch labored hard to complete his "pageant-drama" before he commenced his teaching that fall. He wrote

the play, but the difficulties of producing the work in a war year and with an epidemic of influenza in progress were insurmountable, and the project had to be postponed.

Raleigh, The Shepherd Of The Ocean was presented two years later, in 1920, sponsored by the Raleigh Woman's Club and nine other civic organizations, with an underwriting of $3,000 by prominent Raleigh citizens including Mrs. B. H. Griffin, president of the Woman's Club and General Julian S. Carr, president of the State Fair. It was produced with a large cast of actors and with a big chorus drawn from Apex, Cary, Fuquay Springs, Wake Forest and other towns, trained by Professor Dingley Brown, head of the Music Department of Meredith College. The staging of the pageant was entrusted to the veteran director, Elizabeth Grimball who, in a personal note to Koch, described the play as a "beautiful masque" and expressed her delight in being invited to produce it.

Raleigh was presented on October 19, 20 and 21 in the baseball park in Raleigh as a part of the State Fair of that year. Advertising referred to

MUSIC *** DANCING *** CHORUSES
BRILLIANT SPECTACLES
THRILLING DRAMATIC SITUATIONS
500 PARTICIPANTS 500

Lieutenant Walter Simpson played the role of the younger Sir Walter in Part I and Dr. W. C. Horton was the older man in Part II. Mrs. Frank Castlebury was Queen Elizabeth. More than 6,000 people attended the three performances and its popular appeal was attested by the remark an old showman was reported to have made: "That Koch historical show put the Midway completely on the blink the nights he gave it. No sir-ee. Bosco and the wild women hadn't a chance till Mister Pageant packed up and moved away."

Both *Theatre Magazine* and *Christian Science Monitor* gave *Raleigh* favorable reviews. The latter publication devoted two columns to it and said in part:

> The production of the pageant-drama in Raleigh under the direction of Miss Elizabeth Grimball was an achievement of which the

inheritors of the Raleigh tradition may be proud. The acting of the principal characters was especially effective. The spoken lines, so essentially a part of the whole play, carried perfectly to the vast audience of the Athletic Park where it was staged. The color and beauty of the costuming formed an effective background.

This is the first of the series of community dramas fostered by the University of North Carolina through its extension department. Professor Koch has struck a high standard for others to maintain.

The play may be read now in a book which was published soon after the performances. The action of *Raleigh* extends through a Prologue, five Episodes and an Epilogue. The pageant is announced by three trumpet calls from Heralds, whereupon a Chorus of Shepherds, representing the children of Raleigh, enter, dressed in white, "the white of promise," which they wear over rude sheep skins, likewise symbolical. The Chorus summons the Spirit of Youth, who in flowing blank verse salutes the spirit of the heroic Sir Walter and his brave efforts to open up the wilderness of America. In the scenes that follow the audience is shown glimpses of Queen Elizabeth at a garden party, Sir Walter's farewell to Governor White as he is about to sail with his Colonists across the Ocean, and preparations for the meeting of the terrible Spanish Armada. Subsequent scenes show Raleigh's vision of the New World, a conversation with an old servant on the distant land depicted in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Sir Walter's own fateful voyage in 1617, and his death by execution in 1618.

As one reads the play today, one realizes that its literary quality, judged by our standards, is not impressive. The conception is frankly romantic, even sentimental. The form, filled with figures of courtiers, jesters, milkmaids, woodsmen, poets and playmakers, is old-fashioned and the dialogue is stilted.

Sir Walter Raleigh

My good fellow, from whence comes that ancient melody you sing?

The Old Servant

It do be one that my old grandam used to sing as she span by the sea-coal fire in Devon, when I was but a wanton boy.

The Old Servant drones his song and Raleigh falls asleep, to dream that the Spirit of the Orinoco comes and sings to him.

Come, Orinoco calls, calls you again!
Come to Orinoco, land of the yellow gold!
The soft winds singing, the odorous breezes laden,
The myriad sweet bird-voices, the river sweeping to the sea,
All invite you back again, to come again . . . .

In spite of its obvious crudities, however, the play affects one by its earnestness and sincerity. It has considerable dignity. The spirit throughout is strongly expansive, and one can guess that the force of it was felt by the spectators in the ball park when the old Sir Walter, waiting at the end for the summons of the Bellman, addressed his few loyal friends:

Virginia! my "lost colony" of Virginia! My "Citie of Raleigh in Virginia" lost indeed. But not all in vain—for Jamestown thrives, and Virginia "will yet see itself an English nation!"

And still—America, Virginia, *New* England!
What magic words in this my passing hour!
They conjure back the daring vision-days,
And my sure trust in lands beyond the sea.

America! Virginia! *New* England! . . .
A brave new world will yet be won by English
Youth across the seas—a sunbright world
Of high resolve—of faith, and love, and liberty!

Raleigh, the Shepherd of the Ocean is important, not so much in its own merit as a play, as in its preparation for other commemorative pageants in North Carolina. They, in turn, opened up the way for the outdoor symphonic dramas of a later day.

Perhaps the most interesting thing to be noted about Mr. Koch's one gallant thrust into the field of dramatic writing, is the influence it had on Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*. The difference in the handling of the same subject matter by the more gifted student is clear at once, but one can see in the younger man's drama some evidence of his study of the older man's effort. This is especially noticeable in the opening New World tableaux and in the long Garden scene in which Sir Walter discusses his colonial plans with Queen Elizabeth. *The Lost Colony* has some of the same pageantic elements, the same idioms of speech and movement, the same treatment of the colorful minor char-

acters, such as Shakespeare and the sea captains. Since Proff talked much with Green and was close at hand when the *Colony* was being written, he doubtless shared with Green his own exploratory thinking. He was delighted to see the subject matter of Sir Walter and his Colony develop in the steady hands of his poet student into a form of beauty. After the play was produced on Roanoke Island Proff came back again and again to see it, feeling that there was something of himself in the play.

Filled with the thought, as Mr. Koch was after the production of *Raleigh*, that one of the most promising forms of regional theatre existed in outdoor plays, he intended doubtless to follow *Raleigh* with a number of other "pageant-dramas." This ambition was fired by the success of his beloved teacher, George Pierce Baker, in *The Pilgrim Spirit*, produced at Plymouth in December 1920. Koch's time was too occupied, however, for personal supervision of more than one additional major undertaking. This was *A Pageant of the Lower Cape Fear Valley*, written by the Wilmington Sorosis and produced on the banks of the Cape Fear River on June 7, 8 and 9, 1921. Miss Elizabeth Grimball was again the director, and Mr. Koch gave the whole venture his close advice.

Robert Finch, in his unpublished record, *Folk Playmaking in North Carolina*, thus describes the pageant:

> In four parts, this pageant-drama tells the history of Wilmington, from Colonial, Revolutionary, Confederate days until the present. Governor Tryon, Braxton Bragg, Flora Macdonald, and other figures of Carolina history play their parts in the drama. Music and dancing were included, and an unusual feature of the production was the fact that the Cape Fear River, in two episodes of the drama, actually became a part of the play. The first was when Captain Teach, the pirate whose exploits are part of Wilmington history, sailed into view aboard a sloop which was authentic in appearance; the second occurred when another ship approached, in a later scene, representing the daring little Confederate blockade runner, *Lillian*.

Nell Battle Lewis wrote of the production in *The Raleigh News and Observer* (June 12, 1921)

> . . . no one could see it and not appreciate better the great past of North Carolina. There it was, or at least, a thrilling part of it, before

> your eyes . . . . You saw what a gallant State North Carolina has been . . . . In other words, it made you glad that you were a Tar Heel.

Sixteen years later Mr. Koch attempted to coordinate a huge pageant called *A Century of Culture* celebrating the hundredth anniversary of public education in North Carolina. Playwrights in fifty different communities cooperated in its composition, and more than five thousand actors participated. This pageant, however, was too large and too unwieldy and the production was not successful. Far better were *Pageant of Education* staged by John W. Parker, and the several pageants prepared by Ethel Rockwell.

VI. THE PLAYMAKERS THEATRE

With his development of original playwriting in North Carolina, Proff Koch was determined to do something about staging. The productions at Grand Forks had been mounted very simply, with draperies used with a few suggestive set pieces to which appropriate properties were added. The painting and lighting had been crude and not very satisfactory. Proff wanted to do better than that in the South, but he had had little training in technical theatre. His principal interest at Harvard had been in the writing; with little time devoted to working with, or even to observing, the group that put on the plays for the "47 Work Shop." Now, he had little to refer to in experience or memory for help in scenery-making, but he could experiment, and through experiment he could learn. Proff and his students went to work.

The first inventions were ingenious, but not much more. They constructed a stage setting much as if they were building a house, nailing together out of two-by-four lumber the frame for a whole side or rear wall, in one piece. This they covered with muslin; the strips of cloth were cut and sewed together, primed, painted, and tacked into place on the frame. Changes of scenery were effected, not by shifting the frames, but by ripping off the muslin painted for one scene and tacking up in its place a differently painted sheet for the next. Scene-changing time, filled with the ringing of hammers, was often rather noisy,

and Proff helped to take the waiting audience's attention from the racket by making a speech before the curtain.

One of Mr. Koch's great gifts lay in his ability to draw into the circle of his activities the interest and aid of people outside his classes. He showed this talent all his life, but especially in the beginning years at Carolina. Proff needed a proscenium frame and a front curtain for the school-house platform and Professor Walter W. Rankin of the Department of Mathematics found himself constructing it. Parker Daggett of the School of Engineering made a footlight strip, Mrs. Lucile Prouty assisted with costumes; Cornelia Love of the Library staff had once had some stage training at Radcliffe, and now she was showing new actors how to make up their faces, and helping the stage crew with the properties. Within a remarkably short time after Mr. Koch's arrival he had much of the campus and many people of the town happily engaged in his productions.

Little by little the Playmakers improved their techniques. They read manuals, wrote letters to experts, asked questions of those who had experience, and the quality of the presentations rose. The greatest impetus given to the development and organization of the Playmakers as a producing body came from one man, a man who became Professor Koch's good man Friday soon after the beginning of the dramatic work at Carolina, and who remained with Proff as aide and adviser through some of the Playmakers' crucial years.

George V. Denny began his University career as a Commerce student but, through his fondness for acting, he was drawn into the dramatic group. In 1919 he appeared in the first production, *When Witches Ride*, and in 1924 he became the group's first staff member—Business Manager of the Playmakers and Instructor of Play Production. Denny's genius for promotion and his real understanding of publicity values led him to organize the first subscription audience and to book the first tours and he also directed a number of productions. In 1926 he resigned to enter the professional theatre, which he soon left to become president of Town Hall in New York and founder and director of Town Hall of the Air.

Proff had another valuable assistant in P. L. Elmore, who in

The PLAYMAKERS THEATRE, the first state-owned playhouse in the United States to be dedicated to the writing and producing of a native drama.

The FOREST THEATRE where the Carolina Playmakers produce each season the plays of Shakespeare and the Greeks, and the great classics of other periods.

1923 while still a student, was appointed Playmaker Stage Manager, a responsible post which he held until his graduation in 1925. Elmore worked with Denny on management until 1926 when both men turned their jobs over to Hubert Heffner, and "P. L.", with George, went to the professional theatre. For some years Elmore worked in and out of Broadway's playhouses, alternating assignments in stage managing and directing with periods in business.

Both Denny and Elmore were at the University when The Carolina Playmakers moved into their new home. Through the first seven years Mr. Koch's group had mounted all its plays on the little makeshift stage in the Chapel Hill High School, while Proff had dreamed of a permanent home for his troup. At last the dream was realized when the new Law School Building was constructed, leaving Smith Hall, the former Law Building unoccupied. This handsome little structure, with its Corinthian columns surmounted by capitals composed of corn and wheat ears instead of the traditional acanthus leaves—said to have been designed by Thomas Jefferson—was one of the oldest on the campus. Erected in 1852, it had served as the University Library, then as gymnasium, before it became the law center. Tradition says that during the War Between the States, some of Sherman's horses were quartered in it. In more prosperous days, the university students had held their annual ball in Smith Hall, with a huge caterer's cake sent all the way from New York standing in splendor at one end, and the Governor and his party looking down on the dancing from the balcony above.

The Administration had appropriated funds for the alterations of the building and the Carnegie Foundation had made a grant for the equipment of the stage, and for the construction of two handsome chandeliers designed by the University's architect, Arthur Nash. It was with a real sense of pride that, on the evening of November 23, 1925, Proff heard President Harry Woodburn Chase dedicate the Playmakers Theatre:

> Through the joint action of the Carnegie Corporation and the University, this building has been made available as a permanent home for The Carolina Playmakers. That it will be worthily used the extraordinary achievement of the Playmakers during the years gives every assurance. We therefore dedicate it tonight in the confidence

> that it may make possible about our common life a little more of the stuff that dreams are made of; that its existence here shall mean a little less monotony, a little more glamour about our days; that the horizons of imagination shall by its presence here be enlarged so that we shall come more steadily and wholly to see the place of beauty and of its handmaiden, art, in a civilization not too much given to its encouragement. To such purposes, Mr. Director, this building, the first permanent provision for any of the fine arts at the University, is from this night set apart.

As soon as the Playmakers came into possession of their Theatre and had furnished it properly with stage lighting, dressing-room and other facilities, it became in every way the center of their activities. They not only presented their plays, they also built and painted their scenery, constructed their costumes, and held most of their classes there. The theatre was lived in all day long and frequently far into the night by the students and by their faculty guides; it was their university home.

VII. ADVENTURES IN TOURING

Having completed, as he felt, one long and important chapter in the struggle to establish The Carolina Playmakers permanently in North Carolina, Professor Koch requested in 1926 a year's leave from the University to go again to Europe. There he revisited the countries he had seen as a young man and especially enjoyed seeing Greece again. He looked at buildings and stages, saw the old theatre sites at Athens and Epidaurus, and he gathered many photographs which he later hung around him in his office and used as illustrations in his classes.

In the same summer of 1926 there was a general departure from Chapel Hill. With Proff went Denny and Elmore, not to Europe but to New York. To take the places of all three for the year came Hubert Heffner, a Carolina man who had taught in far-away Wyoming and Arizona, but had been affected by homesickness and was glad to return to his native state and his Alma Mater. Heffner was a man of keen mind and fabulous energy. He lectured, he directed, he ran the business office of the Playmakers, he booked their tours, he acted leading roles (mostly comic ones) in their folk plays, he took a program of graduate

studies—and still had plenty of time to spend in his own and other people's homes spinning his yarns in dialect. He remained at the University for four years, and under his very successful management, Playmaker touring became not only an established institution, but such a lucrative one that it almost financed the Chapel Hill productions.

In 1927 Professor Koch returned to the University and in the fall of the same year Samuel Selden joined the staff, as technical director. He had been variously engaged in and around New York during the five preceding years, mostly as Assistant Technical Director and Stage Manager of the Provincetown Playhouse. That was during the period when Kenneth Macgowan, Eugene O'Neill and Robert Edmond Jones were directing the Playhouse. They were then producing the early plays of O'Neill, but they were also interested in new works by other young American authors, one of whom was Paul Green.

It was in connection with Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* that Selden had met the author, and through him made his first first personal contact with Chapel Hill. At a rehearsal of the play Green had commented with interest on the ghostly effect of the thin little wind that blew along the roadway through the woods, just before Abraham McCranie killed his white half-brother, Lonnie. The director, Jasper Deeter, informed the playwright that the stage manager was producing the effect without benefit of mechanical device; he was simply whistling softly through his lips. Green asked to meet the human wind machine, and they had a brief but pleasant conversation.

It was not at this meeting, but through correspondence with Hubert Heffner, and later, with Proff Koch, that Selden arranged for his appointment to the University. The agreement covered his technical services for one year only. It had never occurred to him that he would wish to devote his life to teaching, and it was with considerable misgiving that he allowed himself to become entangled in education for even the one season agreed upon. The story of his subsequent behavior was similiar to that of so many others who have come to Chapel Hill for just a "brief visit;" once he became acquainted with "the village" he did not wish to leave it.

Mr. Selden's memories of his first year with The Carolina Playmakers are still warm. He recalls vividly the experience of reading, casting and producing the new one-act plays written and criticized in Proff Koch's lively courses; the magic of Proff's kindly encouragement which persuaded even the most timid, the most hesitant, students to *try* writing, and the excitement of the students and their friends when they found one day that they too had composed something that had about it the form of the stage! He remembers his city-bred cynicism about all amateur actors, and how, reluctantly, he found himself retiring from this attitude when he saw the sensitive performances of John Harden and Katherine Batts in a revival of Paul Green's *Fixin's*.

Proff entrusted some of the directing to Mr. Selden, that year, and he recalls the pleasure of working with the fresh young genius of Loretto Carroll Bailey. One of the plays he staged was her *Job's Kinfolks*, which, after its initial performance on the campus, was selected for touring. Through the years that followed, this poignant little tragedy of a mill-town mother who tries to save her wayward daughter by marrying her to an older and unsympathetic man, was revived repeatedly in Chapel Hill and on the road, usually with the author herself playing the part of the grandmother, Kizzie. In all, *Job's Kinfolks* was performed over fifty times. The audiences were always responsive.

Mr. Selden's memory goes to the light plays as well as the dark ones. He thinks of Wilbur Stout's *In Dixon's Kitchen*— which he persuaded Proff to let him set on a porch just so that he might paint some white clapboards and try out some effects of soft moonlight. (Most of the old scenic pieces found in the theatre at that time were painted in somber colors, unsuitable for comedy.) Two of the actors in that company were Shepperd Strudwick who later went to Hollywood and New York, and Howard Bailey who, after a career as an actor on Broadway and as director in Federal Theatre, went to head the Department of Theatre Arts at Rollins College.

Selden remembers especially the robustly comic performances of Hubert Heffner as Preacher Wakecaster in Margaret Bland's *Lighted Candles*, of Old Man Jernigan in Green's *Quare Medicine* and, best of all, the old Negro, Uncle January Evans, in

The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock. It was difficult for audiences who saw him in this role to realize that the man who played it was a university professor.

The tours which now took place three times a year were strenuous affairs. The scenery, that in former days had been transported in a separate truck, was piled on top of the bus, while actors, technicians, costumes, switch-board and lighting instruments were stowed snugly inside. When the Playmakers went into other states they had to take many long jumps. The call for departure from one town was usually at eight in the morning; the bus would frequently arrive in the next town just in time for the setting-up of scenery; and often there was another long bus ride after the evening performance. In spite of the hard work, there was a festive spirit about the tours. The long journeys were livened with songs; those who found their muscles cramped by too much sitting inside took turns riding on top. The bus always carried two large banners, one tied on each side, announcing to those who gazed as it went by that this was a "show bus" from the University of North Carolina.

During the intermissions between plays, Proff would come before the curtain to address the audience on the theme of Folk Playmaking. He would talk on the history of The Carolina Playmakers, tell about adventures in touring, and introduce the authors of the plays (if they were traveling with the company) or present one or two of the principal actors. Also, he would mention the fact that copies of the various issues of the Folk Play volumes were available for purchase in the lobby, and that, for the convenience of those spectators who did not wish to leave their seats, players in costume would carry books up and down the aisles. Those persons designated for the activity of hawking were seldom enthusiastic about their roles, though they received a percentage of the money received. But Proff was a superb master of festival, and he was usually successful in making the salesmen feel that what they were doing was all a part of the "playmaking spirit" of the occasion.

Proff always accompanied the touring players. When traveling time came he would dismiss all of his classes for ten days and take his place with the others in the bus. He too, with his

pipe, took his turns at riding on top. When Bill Cox's play about the last of the Croatan Lowries, *The Scuffletown Outlaws,* was included in the repertory, Proff liked to sit above with the author who carried with him the rifle of his outlaw hero, Henry Berry Lowrie. The bus with the banners, surmounted by the smiling man with the pipe and his erect, quiet young companion with the gun, made a strong impression on spectators in every town it entered.

In 1928 the Playmakers' Special travelled through Tennessee, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut and New York, presenting the original one-act plays, delighting audiences with their homespun dramas and leaving behind repeated invitations for return engagements. Later they struck out for the Daniel Boone country of Kentucky, forging on into Missouri for the National Folk Festival. They played also in the University Theatre at Yale, on three successive tours at Columbia University in New York, and twice at the Fine Arts Theater in Boston, where the troupe was greeted by Governor Frank Allen at the Massachusetts State House.

In many ways, touring time was the best time of the year for Proff. He met many of his old friends on these trips and made many new ones. As he drove along the countryside in the big bus with his troupe he felt like a general invading new territory. The forces he was conquering were the forces of spiritual darkness!

VIII. DRAMA IN EXTENSION

When Professor Koch founded The Carolina Playmakers in 1918, he also set up a Bureau of Community drama. The purpose of this university agency was to give assistance to school and other groups over the state that wished to promote community expression by means of plays, pageants and festivals. The work was begun with the employment of a field agent who visited dramatic groups and helped them with their production problems; and with the establishment of a free play-lending service.

Elizabeth Lay, the first part-time representative of the Bureau, found that dramatic aid to the state was in such demand

that it insisted on growing into a full-time job. This happened in one year. Miss Lay gave help in every kind of theatrical activity, from the initial organization of a dramatic group to the construction of a set of scenery and the making-up of actors. Wherever possible, the field agent visited a town or school in person; where this was not feasible, she wrote letters giving detailed information and advice.

Proff himself made many trips around the state, talking, lecturing, exhorting the people he met to roll up their sleeves and get to work. He gave a great deal of his own time to the Bureau, guiding its activities, helping with the letter-writing, and editing pamphlets.

When Elizabeth Lay married Paul Green in 1922, Elizabeth Taylor took her place in the Bureau, and she in turn was followed, in 1923, by Ethel Rockwell. Under her capable handling the work in extension expanded. She wrote an historical pageant for children, *Children of Old Carolina*, that was produced twenty-five times in 1923 and 1924. She planned, wrote and directed five other pageants during those two years, directed forty-three plays and three community Chautauquas. Mr. Koch and Miss Rockwell together gave nearly eighty addresses in various parts of the state and aided in organizing thirty-two dramatic groups. More than a thousand copies of plays were lent, and the services of the Bureau went to four hundred and fifty-six communities, three hundred and twenty-two of which were in North Carolina.

In 1924, the Carolina Dramatic Association was formed. This was an organization of amateur groups all over the state that wished to work together under the general supervision of the Bureau. Starting with forty groups in the first year, the Association had grown in 1940 to more than a hundred.

Annually, in October, directors of the member groups met in Chapel Hill for a state-wide Dramatic Institute. There, directors from high school, college and community little theatres took part in a program of illustrated lectures and demonstrations, and observed productions of folk plays by The Carolina Playmakers.

The outstanding event of the year, however, was the Association's Annual Dramatic Festival. The first of the festivals

was held in the Playmakers Theatre in the spring of 1925. As the yearly event grew, it included contests in playwriting, play production, scenic and costume designs, and other arts of the theatre and the winners were awarded much coveted prizes. Special demonstrations were held, for students and for their teachers, and talks on pertinent subjects were made by guest speakers. Citizens of Chapel Hill, Durham and Raleigh attended the various instructional sessions, and especially the plays, as interested observers. The Festival sometimes occupied as many as five days, and was attended by several thousand people from every part of the State.

The guidance of the extension work in drama passed through several other hands until it came to John W. Parker, who began his work as State Representative in 1934 and became Executive Secretary in 1936. A university man, who had been trained in Professor Koch's classes, Mr. Parker organized an extension course in Play Production, which he taught, travelling by car regularly from one instructional center to another. He organized also an annual summer session for high school students. Except for the period of the war when he served in the Air Corps, he has continuously headed the Bureau, and directed the Association as its Secretary. Professor Parker's office still sends out several thousand letters each year to individuals and groups in North Carolina, in other parts of the United States and even in foreign countries. Every spring the Dramatic Festival still draws several thousand actors, directors, designers, technicians and spectators to the Playmakers Theatre.

IX. TENTH ANNIVERSARY

In 1928, Proff Koch looked back on the first ten years of dramatic work in North Carolina and what he saw gave him a feeling of considerable achievement. The Carolina Playmakers had produced fifty-nine of their original folk plays by forty-two different authors. One of their number, Paul Green, had received the Pulitzer Prize, the highest award that could come to an American playwright. The Playmakers had made twenty-one tours, playing in every nook and corner of their home state,

and visiting seven other states and the District of Columbia, from Georgia to New York. In all, Proff's troupe had performed in Chapel Hill and on the road to three hundred and forty-seven different audiences numbering more than one hundred and fifty thousand people.

The Bureau of Community Drama also had been very active. Letters were written to every part of North Carolina, and its representatives personally visited many of the communities. Advice was given as well as material help on problems of make-up and costuming, on the designing and construction of scenery, and on the writing of new plays. The Bureau now had a lending library of over two thousand volumes of play-books, books on acting, play production, little theatre organizations, technical practice and other pertinent subjects. It had available, at fifty cents apiece, a number of play lists and study outlines, such as *Plays for Schools and Little Theatres, Play Production, Play Writing, Recent Tendencies in the Theatre, A Study Course in American One-Act Plays, A Study Course in International One-Act Plays,* and *A Study Course in Modern Drama.*

These and other facts concerning the work in and stemming out of Chapel Hill, are recorded in the third (September) issue of *The Carolina Play-Book,* a beautifully designed little quarterly, whose first issue had appeared in March, 1928. The publication ran for sixteen years, until Proff's death, and he planned and edited each issue with loving care. The heavy-paper cover was decorated by a woodcut artist, Julius Lankes, showing a large smiling mask lighted dramatically as if by footlights. Beneath this, in large letters, was the title of the periodical and at the top, set in a deep border framing a laurel wreath, were the initials, "C.P." The color of the cover paper and of the ink with which it was printed changed each time. Proff and William Pugh, the printer, held long discussions, sometimes quite heated, on the suitability of the different combinations, some of which were rather daring. Proff liked color and here was a place he could use it effectively.

Inside the quarterly were editorials, guest articles on playwriting, folk music, and early stage pioneers by such writers as Paul Green, Lynn Riggs, Walter Prichard Eaton, Archibald

Henderson and Barrett Clark; news notes on the Playmakers and the Carolina Dramatic Association; and one full script of an original one-act play which had been stage-tested by The Carolina Playmakers. Among the dramas appearing in the early issues were Loretto Carroll Bailey's *Job's Kinfolks*, Margaret Bland's *Lighted Candles,* the first of the two set in a Carolina town and the second in the mountains; Louise Wilkeson O'Connell's *The Lie,* a dramatization of a Revolutionary War incident; Helen Dortch's Negro Comedy, *Companion-Mate Maggie*; Gertrude Wilson Coffin's mountain comedy, *Magnolia's Man*; and a Chinese play by Cheng-Chin Hsiung, *The Thrice Promised Bride.* All were illustrated with photographs from the productions.

The second and third issues were the most important parts of the *Play-Book* in 1928, for they carried news of the Southern Regional Conference—the first of three big meetings held between 1918 and 1944 for which the Playmakers were hosts. Scheduled the day before, and during, the Annual Dramatic Festival on April 5-7, it was planned with reference to conferences held in other regions of the United States that year, and attended by dramatic leaders from several southern states. Since the meeting took place in the Tenth Anniversary Year of Mr. Koch's playmaking in North Carolina, it had a special program and acquired a special meaning for those who attended. There were among the delegates several important visitors from the North who came to Chapel Hill to see for themselves the work being done in the middle of Mencken's "Sahara of the Bozart." Among these were Professor Alexander Drummond from Cornell; Dr. S. Marion Tucker, editor and teacher from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute; Proff's old teacher, George Pierce Baker (then at Yale); and Brooks Atkinson from *The New York Times.*

The conference was a leisurely gathering planned more for the renewal of old friendships than for the transaction of business. There were some addresses and a business meeting, and the Playmakers presented for the guests four of their folk plays: *Lighted Candles, Mountain Magic, Job's Kinfolks* and *In Dixon's Kitchen.* Proff took pleasure in showing off his theatre, his museum, his collection of programs and clippings, and in distributing the first issue of *The Carolina Play-Book.* The guests con-

gratulated him on his and his associates' ten-year record of achievement and most of them remained in Chapel Hill to see the State Festival.

When Brooks Atkinson returned to New York he was in a pleasant mood. A little amused by the enthusiastic earnestness displayed by some of the leaders of amateur theatre he had seen in the South, yet respecting the value of this earnestness and what it promised for the Regional Drama in the years ahead, he set down his impressions of the Conference in an article for the *Times* (April 15).

> To a Broadway vagrant who visited the recent Southern Regional Conference at Chapel Hill, N. C., the incoherence and indifference of the movement as a movement were at once the most striking and logical aspects of the discussion. One could debunk the Little Theatres with modish facility and still miss their significance completely. . . .
>
> Ten years ago a summons to a dramatic conference at Chapel Hill would have brought scarcely a handful, this year it became a major event. About sixty of the attendants were not mandarins of the Little Theatre movement but working directors of community and university producing groups, afflicted with local and general problems, eager to listen and be listened to.
>
> What they accomplished, apart from conducting their meetings intelligently or lounging and conversing amiably on the cool porticos, may not have been considerable. . . . But it was reassuring to observe that the orators frowned with disgust upon "uplift," that they loathed the word "amateur," that they were far from sanctimonious about the wicked commercial theatre and that they were spirited enough—even fiery enough—to suppress the sentimentalists.

Mr. Atkinson had some reservations about Proff's single-minded obsession with the folk-play form, but he had great admiration for his achievement.

> In fact, what Professor Koch has accomplished, not only at Chapel Hill, but through the state, is nothing short of extraordinary. He has been the animating force in the development of local drama in North Carolina, and he is highly esteemed at home and abroad for his discerning industry and his sapient methods of teaching. Not only the university community but the towns through the state enjoy regularly the fruit of his labors. With the assistance of Hubert Heffner and Samuel Selden he has brought into existence a non-professional theatre with a fine individual tradition, in spite of the fact that a

> quarter of its personnel graduates every year. It produces ably. It has a printed library of its own plays. And in Paul Green, who expounds philosophy at the university and writes prolifically on native themes, it has a graduate who may be conservatively described as a genius.

Proff felt assured now that the work of those first ten years in Chapel Hill were on the right track, and he could see more clearly what needed to be done in the time ahead. He thanked Mr. Atkinson for his comments. Even more than the city editor's opinion, however, he sought the opinion of his old teacher of the Boston years. He was happy when Professor Baker wrote him:

> I am still thinking with much pleasure of my days in Chapel Hill. . . . It seemed to me a very successful conference and I think you have every right to be much pleased with it. The enthusiasm, sincerity, honesty, and frankness of the speakers were marked. I feel sure that all the members of the National Committee agreed in thinking it a notable conference.

X. THE MOVING SEASONS

In 1929, Elmer Hall became technical director in Chapel Hill while Samuel Selden returned to New York to do some studying in the field of design, and to complete with Hunton Sellman a book on scenery and lighting. The following year Hubert Heffner resigned from the Playmakers' staff to go to Northwestern and Selden replaced him as Proff's executive officer at the University. In 1931, Harry and Ora Mae Davis joined the staff, he to take over the business office and assist Proff in playwriting and she to be secretary. Harry was a graduate of the University of South Carolina where he had been directing the Town Theatre in Columbia. Soon, he gave up his advisory work among the writing students and took over Mr. Selden's technical duties, and Ora Mae became the Playmakers' costumer.

In 1931, the University of North Carolina gave Mr. Koch a Kenan Professorship. Thereafter, Proff signed all his more official letters with his name followed by "Kenan Professor of Dramatic Literature."

Professor Koch as Mercutio in *Hamlet*

Professor Koch as Hamlet

In May 1934, the Playmakers traveled out to St. Louis to give five performances of their plays at the First National Folk Festival. They had a close feeling of kinship to the institution they were attending because it was headed by Gertrude Knott, former secretary of the Bureau of Community Drama in North Carolina. Her idea for the National Festival had grown out of her experiences in the East.

For the Forest Theatre production in May 1935, the Playmaker staff selected *Hamlet.* This time Proff gave up to Mr. Selden his traditional role of director and became an actor—he played Hamlet. The cast throughout was made up of veterans. Harry Davis was the Ghost; Robert Nachtmann, Claudius; and Louise McGuire, the Queen. Patsy McMullan played Ophelia and William Wang (as William Wood, the author of *The Edge of Darkness*), Laertes. William Olsen was the First Grave Digger and George McKie, the Priest. Wilbur Dorsett and Selden designed the setting and the special music for the drama was conducted by Earl Slocum.

Proff's performance in the title role was vigorous and straightforward. Playing outdoors in a large theatre did not make possible the use of much subtlety, and Hamlet's sombreness was complemented by a youthful dash. Koch leaned more toward the romantic and gallant than toward moody qualities, but this was done deliberately, since he felt that the youthful side of the Prince had never been sufficiently emphasized. The soliloquies were cut down, and action was accentuated. It was breath-taking every time Proff and Willie Wang lashed at each other with their rapiers and the spectators had a sense of profound relief when the dueling scene was completed with no actual wounds.

The comment around the campus was that "Hamlet's inky cloak is touched with crimson," and Proff's unorthodox interpretation caused a great deal of argument, for and against. All agreed, however, that the performance was interesting; that it was anything but dull.

After the play, Mr. Koch went out to Grand Forks to give the commencement address at the University of North Dakota. While he was there, he received from the institution where he had once taught, an honorary degree, Litt. D. Friends and ac-

quaintances all over the country sent him letters of congratulations.

In Chapel Hill Proff continued to teach his three courses in literature: Shakespeare, Comparative Drama and Modern Drama; and his three courses in composition for the theatre: Playwriting and Experimental Production I, II, III. He spoke to audiences on all the Playmakers' tours—"spreading the gospel," he called it; and supervised the growing extension activities. Every spring he presided over the Dramatic Festival, and in May he directed the Playmakers' outdoor play in the Forest Theatre. During the summers he was absent from Carolina. He went away to lecture and teach in New York, Ohio, Illinois, Colorado, California and Canada. For several years he went to the Banff School of Fine Arts in the Canadian Rockies. These seasons he enjoyed especially, for here in the beautiful cool highlands he could work with his gifted former student, Gwen Pharis, now turned teacher, in starting young authors in a wholly new section of the continent. The mountains too were inviting, and he spent many hours climbing them.

At Christmas time Proff read Dickens' *A Christmas Carol.* He read it first in the Playmakers Theatre and, when the crowds who came could not enter that little building, he moved into Memorial Hall. What he gave was not so much a reading as a dramatic performance. He kept the book of the story before him, but he had memorized every word of it, and this allowed him to lift his face to the audience to show the twisted agony suffered by Old Scrooge while he changed from a hard-hearted miser into a warm-natured man filled with the spirit of Christmas. Proff used the full range of his flexible voice, trained in the early elocutionary exercises and developed through years of reading Shakespeare and other classics. He cried, he whispered, he shouted, he squeaked, he growled, he laughed and the audiences sat entranced. After the performance in Chapel Hill he went on the road with Jeanie, his wife, who drove the car. He presented the *Carol* in towns across the state and his daily movement was traced by the newspapers in the spirit of a triumphal tour.

In quieter moments Koch assumed the role of editor. He prepared the issues of the quarterly *Carolina Play-Book,* gather-

ing articles and pictures, and trying out new samples of paper and new combinations of type, working always to improve the appearance of the publication.

At the same time he was editing books. These were collections of one-act dramas written in his classes and produced by the Playmakers. In 1922, 1924, and 1928 he produced the First, Second and Third Series of *Carolina Folk-Plays.* In 1931 he put out *Carolina Folk Comedies,* and a few years later *American Folk Plays.* This book was made up of works written under Koch's guidance elsewhere as well as at Carolina. Then came a single-volume edition of *Carolina Folk-Plays.* He edited for the University Press three anthologies of dramas by single authors: Josephina Niggli's *Mexican Folk Plays,* Bernice Kelly Harris' *Folk Plays of Eastern Carolina* and Kate Porter Lewis' *Alabama Folk Plays.*

XI. THE HOUSE ON GLENBURNIE STREET

Proff's life in Chapel Hill had four centers: the Playmakers Theatre, the Forest Theatre, his office in the Dramatic Museum in Murphey Hall, and his home, the spacious brown-shingled house set in a large, quiet, shady yard on Glenburnie Street. Proff never allowed himself to get too busy to keep in contact with that house. People might walk in and out of his office, or take him over to the theatre, all morning, afternoon and evening every day from Monday through Friday. But Saturday mornings were always reserved for his Negro gardener, and Sundays belonged to his family.

The Koch group was a closely unified and closely moving organism, in spite of the very different personalities that composed it. There were Proff, Jeanie and four sons. Proff was the bounding mercurial one, ever active. Fred was much like his father, restless, sentimental and experimental. He made brilliant marks in school and left the University as president of Phi Beta Kappa, but it took him some years to complete a tour of English literature and sociology before he finally decided that his talents

belonged where his father's did, in the theatre. Once he made his choice, he stuck to it.

George had none of the gregarious inclinations of his older brother. In him there was a tendency toward silent, orderly thought which he inherited from his German ancestors; he was the scientist and engineer. Bob was an artist; and Bill, still the youngster, was interested in the usual pursuits of a school boy—sports, parties and scouting.

Jeanie managed this diverse household with fine efficiency. Looking over her group of men, she must at times have wished that she had a daughter to talk to, someone feminine to help her with household chores and to consult with on womanly problems. For a while she had her niece, Adeline Denham with her, but when Adeline married Fred B. McCall of the University Law faculty, Jeanie's family became all masculine once more. Fortunately, she had an Irish sense of humor. Proff used to say that without that gift she could never have kept the poise she showed. During one brief period when there was a break between Fred and his father it was Jeanie's laughing good sense that brought them together again.

The Koch family made much of the changing seasons. Spring was the time for gardening; summer the time for entertaining. The Playmaker staff came frequently to the house on Glenburnie Street, and there were even some weddings there. The most memorable was, perhaps, the marriage of John and Darice Parker. The late afternoon was pleasantly warm; the flowers were in bloom, the garden dressed up attractively with special furniture set out for the occasion, and there were many guests. The first few minutes of the ceremony had proceeded in perfect order when the preacher's voice was drowned out by the sound of a motor, and Jeanie was horrified to see the ice-cream truck she had summoned earlier in the day backing noisily along the driveway into the center of the wedding. When that disturbance had been disposed of, the ceremony went on, only to be interrupted again when a white-clad Negro stepped ostentatiously into the gathering bearing on his shoulder a large bottle of champagne. An admirer of the Parkers had sent this gift to them, and he had instructed his messenger to make his entrance in such a way as to

let all present see clearly what he brought. It had not occurred to him that this might take place in the middle of a prayer!

Fall was the time for walking in the woods. All the boys liked to walk, but especially Proff and Fred. The walks were long ones. When Fred left home, Proff missed his companionship and tried to persuade others to join his tramps. One of those he sometimes called on was Samuel Selden who rather prided himself on his physical stamina; but after two or three of the Sunday-morning ten-mile "walks"—through brush and swamps, across hills and rough, plowed fields—he had to admit reluctantly that Proff's style of locomotion was out of his class. The only way he could protect himself against those cross-country steeple chases was to make it a point to ignore all phone calls on Saturday night.

Christmas was the best time of the year in the house on Glenburnie Street. All the family was at home, and there was a big, handsome tree in the sitting room that everyone helped to decorate. Members of the staff, not otherwise engaged were invited in to dinner and there frequently were house guests. There was singing, good conversation and countless reminiscences. Proff was always pleased when someone would recall the older days in Chapel Hill, or one of the tours, or asked him questions concerning Dakota days, or about his summers in Canada and his and Jeanie's travels in Europe. Some of the spirit of the *Carol* which Proff read in that season pervaded the Koch home.

XII. THE WORK GROWING

The year 1936 was an important one for The Carolina Playmakers. Proff received his second honorary degree, another Litt. D., from his Alma Mater, Ohio Wesleyan. There were two marriages in the staff, one between John Parker and Proff's secretary, Darice Jackson—already described—and the other, Samuel Selden, to Wautell Lambeth. Wautell, a fine young water-color artist, found herself almost immediately in overalls working in the scene shop. During the next twelve years, until her death in

1948, she contributed much to the art work in Chapel Hill and on Roanoke Island. Mrs. Roland Holt established a large theatre collection at Chapel Hill in her husband's name, and the Playmakers took two of Paul Green's plays, *Texas Calls* and *Quare Medicine,* to the Dallas Centennial Exposition. Proff did not go on this trip; he left its management entirely to John Parker who, feeling loath to leave his bride behind, took her with him, so that the expedition into Texas consequently acquired the title of the "Honeymoon Special." The performance of the two plays on the exposition grounds was well received, one of the papers referring to it as "a decidedly artistic and commendable monument to the Texas Centennial."

In 1936, preparations were in progress for the staging of Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* on Roanoke Island, and in the same year, also, a new department came into existence. When Frederick Koch came to Carolina in 1918 he joined the English Department and ever since, the dramatic curriculum, even though it gradually expanded, had remained under the control of that administration. In time, questions arose with respect to the course of study for the Master's degree. Students enrolled in the regular English program were expected to take non-dramatic literature, while students interested primarily in the theatre wanted to concentrate on play material. There was some difference of opinion, too, as to what made or did not make a suitable subject for a thesis. Frederick Koch and George Coffman, head of the English Department, discussed these problems carefully and came to the conclusion that a division would be advisable, and President Graham gave his approval. Thus the Department of Dramatic Art was born. In reality it had been in existence for some years so the action in the fall of 1936 was chiefly a formality. The separation was effected in a friendly spirit and since 1936 the English Department and its offspring have remained on very cordial terms with each other. There has been much interchange between the two: several courses have been cross-listed in the offerings of English and Dramatic Art, and the students in the new division still take most of their minor work in English. Robert Sharpe of the English faculty, appointed to a part-time position in the dramatic group, continues

today to teach two courses for Dramatic Art and has a place as Literary Adviser on the Playmakers Staff.

The setting up of the new department meant a substantial revision of curricula. Courses were added. Students who wished to do advanced work in playwriting were given an opportunity not only to take a graduate course in the full-length form, but also to submit a three-act play in lieu of the traditional thesis. An increase in academic offerings meant, too, an increase in faculty. In the beginning Professor Koch was alone. First, he had a part-time assistant, then a full-time instructor, Samuel Selden. After the departure of Hubert Heffner and the coming of Harry and Ora Mae Davis, there were John Parker and Professor Sharpe, and a little later Howard Bailey joined the staff. When Howard left, his place was taken by Earl Wynn, who developed the radio unit which grew in time into the University Communication Center.

The working team was further augmented in 1935 by the addition of three graduate assistants, and in 1936 there were four. Provided first through a yearly grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, their salaries were gradually taken over by the University and some of the most distinguished alumni of the Department have held these assistantship appointments. Three returned to teach at Chapel Hill: Lynn Gault, Kai Jurgensen and Robert Schenkkan. Gault was for several years Technical Director of the Playmakers; Jurgensen, besides instructing in the Department, directs the summer production of Kermit Hunter's outdoor drama, *Horn in the West*, at Boone, North Carolina; and Schenkkan is Director of Television for the Greater University.

Proff Koch was pleased when he found himself the head of a department. The independence of Dramatic Art made it possible for him and his colleagues to integrate the literary and technical courses with the programs of the Playmakers, and the separate listing in the catalogue gave the division of theatre a place of dignity in the University.

Long habit had developed in Proff an informal way of lecturing and the early charm that infected his classroom sprang from the fact that there were never any strict patterns of conduct

for instructor or students. Frederick Koch disliked academic routine and the exactness of information that graduate work required. In the development of the three-act drama form his greatest strength lay in helping students in their choice of subject matter, and in the selecting of color materials for their characters and their stage settings. Sometimes, too, he was very sharp about picking out the offending elements in a faulty scene, but he was never very sure about the all-over pattern. For aid on this he called on his staff. Though he presided over the group discussion of the new works, Harry Davis, John Parker and Sam Selden held most of the personal conferences with the authors.

The Koch magic operated most strongly in the undergraduate classroom where first discoveries and beginning experiments were more important than finished products. The one-act group was always a large one; there were frequently twenty-five or thirty members, with undergraduates working beside middle-aged or even elderly writers. Everyone wrote at least one play. Proff saw to that; he permitted no one just to "sit and listen!"

What Mr. Koch enjoyed most of all was acting the role of master of ceremonies on the nights the plays were produced. The evening began with some light banter between Proff and the audience, and then he would introduce the shy author of the first piece. The dramatist would be invited to make a few remarks, if he wished, telling how he had found his subject, explaining his purpose in writing about it, and stressing the collaborative nature of his adventure. What happened next is described in an issue of *The Carolina PlayBook* (March, 1938) by Noel Houston, a former newspaper man who had come from Oklahoma to join Proff's class.

> The participation by an audience makes for a lively theatre. Knowing that he will have a chance to have his say, or, if he himself prefers to remain silent, that he will want to weigh the criticisms of others, the spectator watches the play keenly. He is alert to a false note, quick to respond to a telling point. . . .
>
> When the curtain falls on the play, there is the usual applause as the house lights come up. Then the Playmakers' director, Professor Frederick H. Koch, gray, kindly, shrewd, rises near the front and turns to the audience with: "Well, what did you think of that one?"
>
> Cigarettes are lighted. There is a moment of thought. Then,

perhaps from a Jewish lad from New York, a German girl from Berlin, or a Chinese girl from Nanking, comes the suggestion: "The ending was bad. We had been led to believe that Marie was honest and sincere. We sympathized with her. Then she turns out to be just a flirt. That wasn't fair!"

"How many agree with that?" asks Professor Koch. A show of hands. "What do *you* think, John?" John, who may be a village grocer or the dean of the school of music, slowly takes his pipe from his mouth and gives his opinion.

To all this the young playwright, seated and silent, listens intently. No need for him to speak; his voice came from the stage. The playwright will not accept all the suggestions made, of course. Should he do so, the final play would likely be a hodge-podge. But pertinent suggestions for changes, or those overwhelmingly insisted upon by the audience, may be adopted in his revised script.

Several of Houston's own plays, both short and long, were presented to Playmakers Theatre audiences in just this way. The experiences did not finally make Noel a full-time playwright, but they did help him to become a successful novelist in *The Great Promise* and an active writer of short stories for *The New Yorker* and other publications.

Noel Houston had good companions. In this period several other young authors were going through the same process of basic training. They were learning to look with fresh eyes at the regional materials they knew, to create lifelike characters and to make them speak naturally and interestingly. Some of the authors went on writing plays. Others, after spending a period in purely dramatic composition carried their experience in character portrayal, dialogue and setting into other fields. Among these were Josephina Niggli whose Mexican folk plays were put into a volume by that name, and who later wrote *Mexican Village*—made into a film called *Sombrero*—and *Step Down Elder Brother*. In the group also were Betty Smith, before she wrote *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*; Robert Finch, who was later the author of *Plays of the American West,* and other plays produced around the country and made into motion pictures; Foster Fitz-Simons, who wrote for Proff before he prepared his long novel of the Southern tobacco industry, *Bright Leaf*; Howard Richardson, who got much of the material for his ballad drama, *Dark of the Moon,* from the playwriting class in Chapel Hill;

and Daphne Athos, who tried the dramatic form before she wrote her novel, *The Weather of the Heart.*

Among others who started in Proff's class were Elizabeth Lay Green, LeGette Blythe, Jonathan Daniels, Dougald MacMillan, Frances Gray Patton, Walter Carroll, Bernice Kelly Harris, William Woods, Joseph Mitchell, and Gwen Pharis Ringwood. The products of these authors and their companions would fill a long shelf today and many of them are still writing actively.

The Experimental Plays in the Playmakers Theatre graduated actors as well as authors. Among them were, besides Shepperd Strudwick and Lionel Stander of the early days, Douglas Watson, Whitner Bissell, Eugenia Rawls, Robert Carroll and Robert Armstrong. There were also Robert Nachtmann, (Robert Dale Martin) and John Paul Nickel, who have had distinguished careers in television. Kay Kyser played with the Playmakers for a while. Their performances in Chapel Hill were always done with a sense of excitement. Sometimes the acting was finished, sometimes still quite crude, but it was always sincere and it was filled with an inner enthusiasm which affected the audience. "Experimental" night in the Playmakers Theatre was adventure night.

XIII. "CAROLINA FOLK-PLAYS" AND "AMERICAN FOLK PLAYS"

The best of the plays written in Professor Koch's courses—excepting some of those which appear in the collections of individual authors—are included in two volumes, *Carolina Folk-Plays* and *American Folk Plays.* Significantly, all of the compositions are in the one-act form. The last anthology to appear was the Carolina one, published by Henry Holt and Company in 1941 and dedicated to Jeanie. In the book are plays from the First, Second and Third Series of *Carolina Folk-Plays,* including such favorites as *When Witches Ride,* by Elizabeth Lay, *Trista,* by the same author, and Dougald MacMillan's piece on Theo-

dosia Burr's portrait, *Off Nag's Head.* In the volume also are two mountain plays by Thomas Wolfe, *The Return of Buck Gavin* and *The Third Night*; Paul and Erma Green's *Fixin's*, Loretto Carroll Bailey's *Job's Kinfolks*, Gertrude Wilson Coffin's comedy, *A Shotgun Splicin'* and Margaret Bland's tragedy, *Lighted Candles.* There are several other plays, each introduced by a sketch of the author; and the whole collection is prefaced by Mr. Koch's own story of the Playmakers' development.

The Carolina plays all came early in Proff's own growth as a teacher. They are still read and produced, but now less often than the dramas in the second volume. *American Folk Plays*, issued by D. Appleton-Century in 1939, is dedicated to Archibald Henderson. The twenty plays in it come from seventeen states and two foreign countries, Mexico and Canada, and are arranged in the form of a dramatic tour around North America. Beginning in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, going by way of Mexico to California, the journey comes back by way of Western Canada to Massachusetts, down to Ocracoke Island off the eastern coast of the State, where the tour started. Three centuries of American life are recorded. The subjects include such legendary figures as Nancy Hanks and Davy Crockett, the gold rush days of the Old West, the lean ways of New England folk, the gentle Mormons and the excitable Mexicans. There are character studies of Dakota farmers and an Oklahoma outlaw, a ballad play from Mississippi, a Negro ritual drawn from Georgia, comedies from the Ozark Mountains and from a fishing community in Carolina. Great variety is a feature of these pieces and much of the writing has considerable maturity. The authors with whom Proff worked in his summer classes around the country were older, more experienced, people than the first youngsters in Chapel Hill. The teacher too had ripened.

American Folk Plays has an informative introduction by Mr. Koch and an illuminating Foreword by Mr. Henderson. It is in many ways a remarkable book, expressing better than any other work, probably, the wide range of the folk-drama idea in America. In an article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (July 1, 1939), Stephen Vincent Benét expressed his feeling concerning the volume:

> This book marks twenty years of the Playmakers Theatre at Chapel Hill and twenty years, as well, of Professor Koch's indefatigable efforts in the cause of American folk drama. . . . Each playmaker has honestly tried to get to grips with some one aspect of American life. . . . It is an interesting and, in many respects, a remarkable achievement. The plays themselves are workable and workmanlike. . . . The most interesting part of the whole adventure, to me, is that for twenty years the Playmakers Theatre has carried on, successfully, given pleasure to many people, and taught those who have worked with it something about the theatre and something about American life that they might not have come to otherwise. From every point of view that is a sizeable achievement.

XIV. THE LAST YEARS

Through the last years of Proff's life the activities of the Playmakers were booming. The Radio Division, initiated by Earl Wynn, developed rapidly and a number of coast-to-coast broadcasts of Carolina plays were produced by the larger networks.

In the days of W. P. A. Chapel Hill became headquarters for a regional Federal Theatre Project, operating throughout the State, and from New York came two young writers connected with the Writers' phase of Federal Theatre especially to work at the University: Betty Smith and Robert Finch. Soon they were joined by Herbert Meadows, and the presence of these three gifted and industrious playwrights gave tremendous stimulation to the efforts of the student dramatists.

The Lost Colony prospered. Playmakers were going all over the country to work in summer productions elsewhere. In 1941 the Playmakers organized a touring company, under the sponsorship of Redpath, which took Paul Green's *House of Connelly* on the road for several months. It played up and down the East Coast, then went west; wherever it went it received excellent notices. The play was praised, and the performance of the young actors lauded. Harry Davis headed the group until the tragic illness of Ora Mae brought him home to Chapel Hill.

Plans were drawn by Waldron Faulkner of Washington for

a new and larger Playmakers Theatre. Proff remarked frequently in those days that The Carolina Playmakers were "getting too big for their britches," and the new building, it was hoped, would bring the dramatic functions, then scattered among seven widely separated centers on the campus, under one roof. Meanwhile, the Forest Theatre was extensively remodeled in accordance with designs by Albert Bell, architect of the Waterside Theatre at Manteo.

Irene Smart joined the Costume staff and, with her help, the productions in the Playmakers Theatre, Memorial Hall and outdoors were dressed as they had never been before.

Each morning on his way to the campus Proff walked by the Forest Theatre. There he sat for awhile communing with himself. What his thoughts were he told no one. Perhaps he recalled the productions he had staged there in many springtimes: *The Tempest,* with Urban T. Holmes and Shepperd Strudwick; *Lysistrata,* with Betsy Farrar; *Rip Van Winkle,* with Hubert Heffner as Old Rip; *Peer Gynt,* set by Herbert Andrews and with Douglas Watson in the role of Peer; his own performance in *Hamlet*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream, A Winter's Tale,* and *Androcles and the Lion.* He probably thought too about the communal playwriting he had planned to promote as a young man, and how the idea had grown, and was still growing.

The death of Ora Mae Davis in 1942 affected Proff greatly. His mind had always been set on life, and death, for him, was hard to accept. Ora Mae's passing came soon after that of Tom Wolfe, and the two deaths left a scar on Proff's heart.

In these days he found great comfort in associating with his old friend, Archibald Henderson. Though belonging to two very different departments, they were both enthusiasts about the theatre. Professor Henderson's books on Continental dramatists, and his monumental *Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet,* had been constant references for Proff throughout his teaching. Henderson had written numerous articles about Proff and the Playmakers, and had prepared the biographical introduction to *American Folk Plays.* Together, the two men had seen and experienced much during the changes at the University.

The war years were especially trying for Proff. As a man of

peace, dedicated to the concept of a world where everyone was a creator, he could not understand how the minds of men could be seized by the passion to destroy. His staff members were joining the armed services—Harry Davis, John Parker, Lynn Gault, and Earl Wynn. One by one he saw the Carolina boys go away to fight, among them, his own son, Bob. He heard of the deaths of Fenley Spear, Pendleton Harrison, and Joseph Feldman, perhaps the most promising of all the playwrights. To take their places there were, it is true, Douglas Hume, Robert Burrows, Foster Fitz-Simons and Lucile Culbert. He was happy to have them; but he wanted always to *add* to his family, not to get the new members by having the others go!

What helped to sustain Mr. Koch in this difficult period was visits by the boys on leave. They always sought him out as soon as they arrived on campus and often they came with the sole purpose of seeing him. The letters, too, were welcome. He kept up a voluminous correspondence with soldiers, sailors, and fliers in every part of the world. Each letter he sent out contained a program of one of the recent plays and he liked, especially, to remind them of the Experimental Plays!

There were two other things that helped to lighten Proff's spirit. One was the presence of the gifted Chinese girl, Lilly Tang, who, caught in this country by the war in the Pacific, stayed for several years at the University. She adopted Proff as a kind of temporary father, and he was grateful for her affection. With his encouragement, she wrote several plays, two of which were successfully produced on the Playmakers' stage. Her *The Wandering Dragon* was later published in Samuel Selden's anthology, *International Folk Plays.*

The other thing which brought gladness to Proff was the convening of southern dramatic leaders in Chapel Hill in 1943, to celebrate the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of The Carolina Playmakers. There was a large gathering for the meeting, and at the Anniversary Dinner at the Carolina Inn on the evening of March 25, several speakers paid tribute to their veteran leader. Archibald Henderson, who presided, read letters from some who could not come, and one of the most moving letters came from Paul Green who wrote from New York:

> Twenty-five years I have known you now, and you have held steady and true all that time. Twenty-five years, a third of a lifetime for all lucky men and a full lifetime for many a young fellow striding the battlefield who lacks your chance, our chance. May there be twenty-five more fresh and green years for you, young years, years in which you may continue to inspire, to infect with your creative spirit the souls of boys and girls coming on—as you have inspired and touched me, George Denny, Hubert Heffner, Kay Kyser, lyric and tumultuous Tom Wolfe, and hundreds of others, the listing of which continued at random would cover pages.
>
> Yes, Proff, that's the great guy you were and are and will continue to be. You have taught us to create our dreams and put them forth into some sort of human expression—expression on a stage. However crude they may have been at times, you have recognized the realer thing that lies beyond academism, beyond statistics and methodology and beyond finish, the spit and polish of formal appearance. You have always gone back to the springs that bubble with life-giving strength within us. And that is right, has been right and always will be right. I honor you for it. More power to you!

Frederick Koch did not live to use that other quarter of a century about which Paul Green wrote. It was fortunate that so near the end there could be that heart-warming tribute to the grand Initiator from those whom he had started on their way to playmaking. Just a little more than a year later, on August 16, 1944, Frederick Koch died at Miami Beach where he was on vacation with his family. He tried to swim in a sea which his heart was no longer young enough to fight, and the man of action had to stop.

XV. THE KOCH MEMORIAL FOREST THEATRE

For nine years the friends of Proff Koch tried to raise sufficient funds to build in his memory a Frederick Henry Koch Theatre big enough to house all the work of The Carolina Playmakers. When the further pursuit of this project became impracticable, the money already collected from his friends was put to use in the improvement of the Forest Theatre, and by an action of the University Trustees this became the Koch Memorial. On the

afternoon of May 22, 1953, with Frank Porter Graham giving the principal address, the Theatre was dedicated, with Patricia Ann Koch, little daughter of Proff's youngest son, Bill, to pull the cord that unveiled the plaque beside the entrance. The inscription had been prepared by Proff's friend, Archibald Henderson.

THE FOREST THEATRE

FOR HERE NOW UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE IN A NEW-WORLD FOREST OF ARDEN THROUGH LOVE AND ADMIRATION OF THOUSANDS OF HIS STUDENTS IS DEDICATED TO

FREDERICK HENRY KOCH

BORN SEPTEMBER 12, 1877 — DIED AUGUST 16, 1944

THIS OPEN AIR PALACE OF LIGHT AND SOUND HAUNT OF BIRDS AND BREEZES AND HUMAN VOICES HOME OF NATURAL BEAUTY POETRY AND DRAMA SET UPON THE WARM EARTH IN ENDURING STONE TO COMMEMORATE AN ARDENT GENIUS WHO INSPIRED AND FOSTERED THE AMERICAN FOLK PLAY AND LIKE ANOTHER JOHNNY APPLESEED SOWED THE CREATIVE SEEDS OF COMMUNAL AUTHORSHIP THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

EPILOGUE

Explorers are seldom finished builders also; history has shown this. The explorer's eyes are ever on the distant mountain, on the valley beyond the rise, the next curve of the river; he is too restless to pause long in any one place. To others then must fall the responsibilities for clearing the trees, digging the earth and laying the foundations for the houses that make the working communities. Frederick Koch realized this. He realized it clearly. He knew that he had fulfilled his part and that he must leave to other people the rest of the labor. In the introduction to his last volume, *Carolina Folk-Plays,* he wrote:

> From the first we have thought of our Playmakers as a fellowship of young people working happily together toward a single ideal—the making of a communal, a people's theatre in America. Walt Whitman happily expresses it, "An institution of the dear love of comrades." Important as the individual is in the theatre, it is well for us to remind ourselves constantly that the dramatic is essentially a social art. Whatever The Playmakers have achieved is due primarily to their holding fast together to such an objective. Whatever we have done, we have done together . . . .
>
> What of the future? I go back to a conversation of my high school days with one of Walt Whitman's friends. On his last visit to the Singer of America he remembered Old Walt standing in the door of his little home in Camden and calling out in farewell, "Expecting the main things from those who come after."

PART TWO

FOLK PLAYMAKING

FOLK PLAYMAKING

by Frederick H. Koch

As far as we have been able to determine, the first use of the term "folk play" in the American theatre was The Carolina Playmakers' announcement: CAROLINA FOLK PLAYS on the playbill of their initial production in Chapel Hill twenty-one years ago. The first play presented was *When Witches Ride,* about folk superstition in Northampton county, by Elizabeth Lay of Beaufort, North Carolina (now Mrs. Paul Green), which we are reviving with the original cast on Saturday evening. Now the term is not unfamiliar in the expanding scene of our American theatre. Witness Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom,* Lulu Vollmer's *Sun-Up,* Dorothy and DuBose Heyward's *Porgy,* Jack Kirkland's dramatization of Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road.* Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs,* Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset,* Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois.*

From the first our particular interest in North Carolina has been the use of native materials and the making of fresh dramatic forms. We have found that if the writer observes the locality with which he is most familiar and interprets it faithfully, it may show him the way to the universal. If he can see the interestingness of the lives of those about him with understanding and imagination, with wonder, why may he not interpret that life in significant images for others—perhaps for all? It has been so in all lasting art.

Four volumes of CAROLINA FOLK PLAYS by different authors and a volume of Paul Green's early plays, written in the playwriting courses at the University of North Carolina over a period of years, have been published and widely produced in the United States and abroad. The materials were drawn by each writer from scenes familiar and near, often from remembered ad-

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From an address delivered by Professor Koch for the Southern Regional Festival in Chapel Hill on April 5, 1940.

ventures of his youth, from folk tales and the common tradition, and from present-day life in North Carolina. They are plays of native expressiveness, of considerable range and variety, presenting scenes from the remote coves of the Great Smoky Mountains to the dangerous shoals of Cape Hatteras.

Our recent volume, AMERICAN FOLK PLAYS, marks the extension of our North Carolina idea of folk playmaking to other American states, to Canada and to Mexico. It represents the work of twenty new playwrights, eighteen from the United States—all the way from California and the Rocky Mountain region to Florida and New England—one from western Canada, and one from beyond the Rio Grande in Mexico. The plays included were selected from hundreds of scripts written and produced by students in playwriting at Chapel Hill and in summer courses it has been my privilege to conduct in some of our leading universities: Columbia, New York, Northwestern, Colorado, California (both Berkeley and Los Angeles), Southern California, and four summers in Alberta, Canada.

In writing of this anthology (in *The Saturday Review of Literature* of July 1, 1939) under the caption, "The Native Theatre," Stephen Vincent Benét notes: "Each Playmaker has honestly tried to get to grips with some one aspect of American life. It may be Davy Crockett or a farm woman of the North Dakota prairies—it may be a cowboy or an Oklahoma tragedy—the same desire to work with native materials and make something of them is obvious in them all. It is an interesting and, in many respects, a remarkable achievement." And the English reviewer of the *Literary Supplement* of *The London Times* wrote on September 9, 1939: "Those who are tired of thrillers, drawing-room comedies and film fantasies will find these tragedies, farces, and sketches from real life refreshing. . . . It would be worthwhile seeing whether similar 'folk' plays could not still be evoked from our English scene and so bring to the drama a fertilizing influence."

FOLK DRAMA DEFINED

The term "folk," as we use it, has nothing to do with the folk play of medieval times. But rather is it concerned with folk

subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. For the most part they are realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic.

The chief concern of the folk dramatist is man's conflict with the forces of nature and his simple pleasure in being alive. The conflict may not be apparent on the surface in the immediate action on the stage. But the ultimate cause of all dramatic action we classify as "folk," whether it be physical or spiritual, may be found in man's desperate struggle for existence and in his enjoyment of the world of nature. The term "folk" with us applies to that form of drama which is earth-rooted in the life of our common humanity.

For many years our playwrights of the South—indeed of all America—were imitative, content with reproducing the outlived formulas of the old world. There was nothing really *native* about them. Whenever they did write of American life, the treatment was superficial and innocuous.

When Augustus Thomas wrote *Alabama* and *In Mizzoura* optimistic heralds announced the arrival of the "great American drama"; but the playwright barely skimmed the surfaces of these colorful states. His next play, *The Witching Hour,* had something of the jessamine perfume of Kentucky romance, but the ghost of the old well-made melodrama was lugged in to resolve the plot. Then there was *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* a grand old theatre piece, but its treatment of the southern Negro, though sincere, was sentimental. Four native North Carolinians have contributed authentic drama of the Southern scene to the contemporary theatre: Paul Green, a challenging tragedy of the Negro race *In Abraham's Bosom*; Lulu Vollmer and Hatcher Hughes, dramas of the mountain people, *Sun-Up* and *Hell Bent for Heaven*; and Ann Preston Bridgers, domestic tragedy in a small town, *Coquette.*

The Negro Drama

Following Paul Green came Dorothy and DuBose Heyward with *Porgy,* of a Negro neighborhood in Charleston; and Roark Bradford's stories of the *Green Pastures* from Louisiana, to go

singing along for five years all over America. And this week Randolph Edmonds, talented Negro playwright, brings to our Festival stage a tragedy of his own people, *Breeders,* to be enacted by a group of Negro players from Dillard University in New Orleans. The Negro theatre has come a long way in twenty-one years. I recall Paul Green's first Negro play written for the playwriting group at Chapel Hill, *White Dresses,* of a lovely Mulatto girl, Mary McLean—"a tragedy in black and white," he calls it.

Paul said, "I have written that part for you, Elizabeth," referring to Elizabeth Taylor who later played important roles in Brock Pemberton's productions on Broadway for five years.

"I would love to do it!"

But the time was not ripe, although North Carolina was a leader among the Southern states in Negro education and in friendly race relationships. We had to wait. It was with great satisfaction in later years that this same play was brought to our Playmakers' stage by a visiting group of Negro players from St. Augustine's College in Raleigh. And now we have flourishing Negro inter-collegiate and inter-high school dramatic tournaments each spring in North Carolina. The Jim Crow sentiment of the old South is gone and an audience crowded our big Memorial Hall to the rafters when Richard B. Harrison, formerly a teacher in Greensboro, North Carolina, came to Chapel Hill with *The Green Pastures.*

TENANT FARM DRAMA

Twenty-one years ago Harold Williamson, a student in the playwriting class from nearby Carthage, brought to our makeshift stage in the high school the first play of the Southern sharecropper—hitherto undiscovered by the American theatre as far as is known. It was a little tragedy about a tenant farm girl, *Peggy.* The drab cabin that was her home which we had passed a thousand times as a dull sight on the stage became suddenly something new, something interesting, something wonderful. Here the jaded farm woman, Mag, with snuffstick protruding from the corner of her mouth, getting supper of corn bread and fat back, singing the while snatches of an old ballad, was no

longer a commonplace figure. She had been transformed by the magic of the theatre. The tragic fact of her hard-won existence had become a reality to us—life itself that moves and feels—a gripping drama! A neglected chapter of the Southern scene had come to life on our stage.

A little later came Paul and Erma Green's little drama of the grinding poverty of the sharecropper's life in *Fixin's* in which the pent fury of the work-driven wife, Lilly Robinson, is portrayed with grim and terrible reality. She craves a little beauty, "purty fixin's." But her husband's eyes cannot see beyond the sod he plows. The scene is a bare cabin home in Harnett County, North Carolina, but the theme is universal—the pitiful conflict of two natures which are irreconcilable.

The next morning after our Playmakers' tour performance of *Fixin's* in Atlanta, before a sophisticated audience in evening dress, a man came to me and said, "I think I owe it to you to tell you of the effect that little play, *Fixin's,* had on me last night.—I come from New York, and I've been seeing the best shows in the theatre there for thirty years. But that little play last night *got* me so much that, before I went to bed, I went to the Western Union office and telegraphed some flowers to my wife in New York!"

And after a performance in western North Carolina, the reviewer in the *Greensboro Daily News* wrote:"*Fixin's* presented a scene of such stark and terrible reality as to make at least one person in the audience want to rise up and say, 'This thing has got to be stopped.'" The little play had gone beyond the theatre into life itself.

Today the plight of this forgotten class of country people has been vividly portrayed—for better or for worse—in Jack Kirkland's sensational treatment of Erskine Caldwell's story of the degenerate poor white sharecropper of the backlands of Georgia in *Tobacco Road.* And the tragi-comic figure of an irrepressible Jeeter Lester has held the stage for more than five seasons now. . . .

Plays of a Country Neighborhood

It is interesting to note the achievement of Bernice Kelly

Harris, author of *Purslane* and of a recent volume of FOLK PLAYS OF EASTERN CAROLINA, of her own country neighborhood in Northampton County, North Carolina, not far from the Roanoke River. These plays of the simple lives and homely ways of her neighbors and friends were produced originally in her home town of Seaboard and brought in successive years to the annual festivals of the Carolina Dramatic Association at Chapel Hill. Bernice Harris, a teacher of English in a rural school, was a member of the first summer playwriting group in Chapel Hill twenty-one years ago. She was so captivated by her first adventure in playwriting that she was impelled to pass on to her boys and girls the new wonder she had found in folk playwriting. "I saw the beauty of a new sort of humanism," she has written of that first summer.

MEXICAN FOLK PLAYS

Since publishing five volumes of Carolina Plays and a book of twenty American folk plays, The Playmakers issued in 1938 a volume of MEXICAN FOLK PLAYS written at Chapel Hill by Josephina Niggli of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, and produced originally in The Playmakers Theatre here. Plays of the humble lives of her own people, their restless history, their legends and the childlike wonder of their folkways. These Mexican plays have been widely produced throughout the United States and Canada, and many times abroad.

CAROLINA AND CANADA

Sometimes our home-grown plays of Chapel Hill are transplanted to far places. A play of the Canadian frontier, *Still Stands the House*, which Gwendolyn Pharis of Magrath, Alberta, Canada, wrote here in 1938 was last year awarded the first prize of $100, as the best native play entered in the annual Dominion Drama Festival of Canada.

Another case. *Funeral Flowers for the Bride*, written for The Playmakers in 1937 by Beverley DuBose Hamer of Eastover, South Carolina (who vowed at the first that she "couldn't write a play") won first place in England in the International One Act

Play competition of 1938 over one hundred and sixty-six plays entered. It was professionally produced in London at the Duchess Theatre on November 27 of that year.

A Chinese Playmaker

A Chinese boy came to Chapel Hill for playwriting: Cheng-Chin Hsiung of Nanchang, China.

"Hsiung," I inquired, "what kind of play do you want to write?"

"I want to write a play about the Chinese-American problem —a mixed marriage of a Chinese boy and an American girl."

"A good idea, but you can't do it.—We should like to have you write of your own people. You have a marvelous store of legend in old China. We are interested here in what we call the 'folk play.' I wish you would write for us a Chinese folk play."

"If you let me write this Chinese-American marriage play first, then I will write for you a Chinese folk play."

"Hsiung," I said, "you know that you can't understand the mind of an American girl."

"Well, I have been in this country five years."

"Five years! Some of us have lived here fifty years, and we cannot do it! But go ahead, write your problem play first; then write a real Chinese play." So he wrote a play called *Poor Polly* —and it was well named!

Then he went to the storehouse of old China and wrote a charming play, *The Thrice Promised Bride*, in the manner of the Chinese stage—a play of romance, of comedy, of poetry. We were so much impressed with it that I sent it to the editor of *Theatre Arts*, who wrote back, "I like it so much that I want to publish it in our next issue." There Frank Shay saw it and wrote for permission to include it in his anthology *Twenty-Five Short Plays, International*, as the only play in the volume representing China. There Henry Lanier, editor of the *Golden Book*, saw it and paid $105.00 for permission to reprint it in the issue of August 1925. His play of China had won!

So *Poor Polly* passed and *The Thrice Promised Bride* arrived. He wrote another Chinese play, *The Marvelous Romance of Wen Chun-Chin*, which was published in *Poet Lore*.

Our Chinese Playmaker's plays have been favorites not only in the United States but especially in England and we sent him a royalty check for a performance not long ago in far away Kuala Lumpur, Straits Settlements. . . .

COMMUNAL DRAMA OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*, you recall, was written and produced originally in the summer of 1937 to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the first English settlement in America. It has played for three seasons now on Roanoke Island to tens of thousands of people in an outdoor theatre on the actual site of the landing of our first English colonists. Brooks Atkinson in an article in *The New York Times* not long ago, "Ought We to Found a National Theatre?", is eternally right in saying that *The Lost Colony* has become a permanent part of the culture of the people on Roanoke Island. He avers, "As long as they live, these people will have a grander notion of our heritage than they had before this reverent drama was written."

In November of the present year Mr. Green wrote a second drama for the American people's theatre, *The Highland Call*, commemorating the bicentennial of Scotch settlement in the Cape Fear River valley of southeastern North Carolina, the stirring events of Revolutionary times and the heroic leadership of bonnie Flora Macdonald. Extending the idea of communal playmaking in *The Lost Colony*, *The Highland Call* was produced in Fayetteville by The Carolina Playmakers in collaboration with the citizens of that historic town. It evoked such enthusiasm there that plans have been completed for its annual production.

Now Mr. Green is at work on the third drama of his trilogy of early American history. It is to be given for the first time in old Williamsburg, Virginia, beginning early in June and closing before the opening of the summer-long run of *The Lost Colony* on Roanoke Island. Mr. Green holds that America was regarded by the under-privileged classes in the old world as a "land of opportunity," and that this was the compelling motive and promise which brought all classes to our shores and which America must fulfill to validate her beginnings.

Brooks Atkinson observes further in the above-mentioned

article that we are just coming to realize that our country is rich in folklore and "should yield an abundant harvest of drama, and a national theatre that will serve the entire country, should develop regional plays and contribute to a deeper national understanding." I know of no better way toward an imaginative, a spiritual expression of our tradition of democracy. . . .

Those Who Come After

Time alone can tell what will be the effect, for good or bad, of our folk playmaking. According to the editor of *Holland's, The Magazine of the South,* the influence of The Carolina Playmakers "has spread indubitably into the associated fields of the novel, the short story, and even nonfiction works. From the basic idea underlying their work and philosophy stem such writings as those of Caldwell, Heyward, Miller, Bradford, Faulkner, Stribling, and other and younger novelists. Not that many more influences have not impinged sharply and deeply on Southern writers and on Southern thought generally; but The Carolina Playmakers and their example have been a centralizing, crystallizing, and vitalizing force unequaled in Southern literature to date."

From the first we have believed in the South, we have held that the South had something rich and strange to contribute to America, something of native honesty and of beauty. Dr. Albert Shaw in writing of the beginnings in Dakota and in Carolina interpreted our hope in an editorial article in *The American Review of Reviews* of September 1919: "When every community has its own native group of plays and producers, we shall have a national American Theatre that will give a richly varied, authentic expression of American life. We shall be aware—which we are only dimly at present—of the actual pulse of the people by the expression in folk plays of their coördinated minds. It is this common vision, this collective striving that determines nationalism, and remains throughout the ages, the one and only touchstone of the future."

In thinking of the next twenty-one years I go back to a conversation of my high school days with one of Walt Whitman's friends. On his last visit to the Singer of America he remem-

bered Old Walt standing in the door of his little home in Camden and calling out in farewell, "Expecting the main things from those who come after."

PART THREE

REMINISCENCES AND APPRAISALS

"PROFF" KOCH AND HIS PLAYMAKERS

by George V. Denny, Jr.,

God scatters a wide variety of abilities among men. When a man appears to possess an abundance of talents, his fellows refer to him as a genius. Was Frederick H. Koch a genius? I knew him well and intimately during his first eight years at Chapel Hill, eight exciting and productive years during which he became a national figure and set the pattern of his work that endures in expanded form to this day, but I would not call him a genius. He was much more.

Fred Koch lacked the internal chaos and confusion that is characteristic of the genius. He was a man with a single purpose and a clear vision of how to obtain that purpose. Once he saw that vision—a folk theater for America—he rested neither day nor night as long as he lived.

Yet he had many of the marks of a genius. He had almost infinite patience with the students who wrote his folk-plays; with the young players who acted in them; with the photographer, Mrs. Bayard Wootten, who made a lasting record of his plays for twenty-five years. I've known him to use an entire day to get pictures of three one-act plays which he would consider satisfactory. He would keep from twenty to fifty people waiting in costume and make-up through lunch and dinner while he worked with Mrs. Wootten to get just the right pictures of his plays and players. But it was these pictures that persuaded Lester Markel of the New York Times to publish the first article about The Carolina Playmakers to appear in this estimable publication in about 1922. Indeed it was the quality of these pictures that attracted nationwide attention to "Proff" 's work at the University of North Carolina.

George Denny, Professor Koch's first regular assistant at the University of North Carolina, spent a period of time in the professional theatre before he became President of Town Hall in New York and Founder and Moderator of Town Hall of the Air.

Proff had other characteristics of genius. He had a high regard for the importance of his own work. And why not? It *was* important and still is. Some people called it egocentricity. His own picture frequently appeared in his capacity as director of the plays he had produced. Was this so bad? He had pictures made of the Forest Theatre with himself as the sole occupant of the theater. But the Forest Theatre was *his* dream and *his* creation. These pictures represented TRUTH. Was that bad?

If Fred Koch was not a genius, he was certainly a superior human being. That in itself is enough to excite the envy of lesser men. But he strictly ignored the petty jealousies that presented him with some of the obstacles that harassed his early years at Chapel Hill. He cast his predecessor (Professor George McKie, Head of the Department of Speech) for a leading part in his first real folk play, *When Witches Ride,* by Elizabeth Lay Green. He enlisted the cooperation of other members of the faculty in his early productions on the make-shift stage of the old Chapel Hill high school as the University was wholly lacking in a stage suitable for the simplest dramatic production. Full professors donned overalls and became stagehands and electricians to put on the sensationally realistic electrical storm that provided the climax of *When Witches Ride* that launched The Carolina Playmakers in March 1919. High school students were ushers, faculty wives were hostesses, townspeople furnished properties and clothing; it was truly a community enterprise. A great human being with a great idea marching ahead with great enthusiasm in the fulfillment of his dream.

At a banquet of former Playmakers at the Carolina Inn a number of years ago I remarked that the occasion brought many memories to mind, to which Jonathan Daniels quipped, "Name two!" Let me name a few that endeared Fred Koch to me and hundreds of his other students.

First there was his infectious smile that he always used to great advantage when he wanted you "to do something for the Playmakers." And how he loved a party! I recall his first Twelfth Night Revel in the old Gimghoul Hall in which he persuaded Johnny Booker to roll in a steaming pot of Brunswick stew while he (Koch) read a eulogy to bouillabaisse—a French

dish made entirely of seafood! He not only inspired his students to write plays and poems, but fellow faculty members joined in the fun at Proff's parties and wrote and took part in skits. I remember one by a member of the Music Department sung to the tune of "Funiculi, Funiculà"

We are the Playmakers, the Carolina Playmakers
Playmakers of Chapel Hill
And what we do and what we say
May sometimes make you ill
Tra-la-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la-la!
May sometimes make you ill.

We let the critics criticize, we let the highbrows high
For that is the way they live
And what they do and what they say
Inspires the shows we give
Tra-la-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la-la!
Inspires the shows we give.

On tour with fifteen or twenty students traveling in a spacious bus, Proff was in his glory. He'd rather ride on the top of the bus than anywhere else, or on top of the scenery truck which sometimes accompanied us when we had too much for the bus. On our spring tours he'd watch for the blooming redbud and report to each audience in his curtain speeches just where he saw it and what it meant. (Proff was an enthusiastic gardener.) He loved the tours, his visits with the alumni, (we were nearly always the guests of an alumni group and entertained in their homes rather than at hotels) the scenic variety of North Carolina, the quaint characters he'd meet and the astonishing generosity of our hosts. He never forgot, and told audiences frequently in his curtain talks about a farm in Eastern Carolina where we were served nine different kinds of meat at one meal! I was usually entertained in the same home with him and can vouch for the authenticity of this story, although "Proff" was not above "gilding the lily."

He spoke with great seriousness to newspapermen and to his audiences about the "authentic Swiss cow bells" rung as a signal to open the curtains for each play, but naturally never mentioned the fact that anyone could order them if they had access to a Sears-

Roebuck catalogue. In the summer of 1936, when I was in Switzerland for the first time, I made a trip to three factories to buy a matched set for the Playmakers but found none available. I left about $20.00 in American dollars with the son of my landlady who promised to send me a set but have never seen bells or dollars to this day. I can only suppose that Sam Selden still finds Sears Roebuck more satisfactory!

Proff was always equal to any emergency and was nearly always able to turn an apparent liability into an asset. On a winter tour in 1922, we went to Washington, D. C. where the Playmakers were received by President Coolidge at theWhite House and Proff presented the President with a copy of the first volume of *Carolina Folk-Plays*. This was only incidental to what happened later in the day at Huntington, West Virginia, when the scenery truck got stuck in a snowdrift and failed to arrive by curtain time for the first play, *Quare Medicine*, a genuine folk comedy by Paul Green.

Antiquated, though our facilities were on that third floor opera house of the old city hall, we were really in a spot to put on *Quare Medicine* without scenery or costumes. We could have used any old non-descript backdrop or cyclorama or the bare walls of the stage, but as we had no room to take down the standing set we had to put on this play, presumably the interior of a tenant farm house in eastern Carolina, within the sombre gray walls of a medieval castle! The only make-up we could obtain was one lipstick and a coal-black eyebrow pencil and a fourth of a box of powder to gray the hair of some of our student players. On this occasion Proff made his curtain speech before the first play, and although he invited the audience to "piece out our imperfections with their thoughts" it was even too tough for the players to carry this through without bursting out laughing at the incongruities. My entrance as the quack doctor was delayed by a stuck door, but when I finally emerged on the stage in the black coat and derby hat of one of the stagehands—the only semblance of a costume I could obtain—with a painted black mustache and goatee, Helen Leatherwood and the entire cast nearly went into hysterics as the audience remained disdainfully silent.

The scenery arrived while we were trying to finish *Quare*

Medicine and the stage boys tried manfully to bring up trunks and crates quietly on an old freight elevator that required you to pull on a rope as fast as you could while the elevator moved creakingly and uncertainly at a snail's pace. The rest of the scenery had to be brought in from the rear of the "opera house" and over the heads of the audience as Proff joked with them in a second curtain speech about the trials and tribulations of strolling players from Shakespeare's time.

Yes, Proff had many of the earmarks of genius, but I prefer to think of him as a personality inspired by a great dream that carried him through life arousing the creative impulse in others. He was a great teacher because he possessed this ability in such large measure. He was an important figure in the American theater for this reason. He was an important influence in the lives of those who did not stay in the theater because he unleashed their creative talents and inspired them to be themselves with integrity and courage. I join with a host of others in the expression of lasting gratitude for the privilege of having worked with and under the direction of "Proff" Koch.

EARLY DAYS WITH THE PLAYMAKERS

by Cornelia Spencer Love

When Frederick H. Koch first came to Chapel Hill, with his wife and two boys, Fred and George, the place really was a village, where everybody knew everybody else, and you gave the telephone operator the name of the person you were calling, instead of a number. Theatricals had consisted of an annual student play, coached by Professor George McKie, who taught Public Speaking, while every summer Adolph Vermont of Converse College put on his hardy perennial, *Esther Wake*. Occasionally the Ben Greet Players visited the campus. But no one had given courses in the writing of plays, much less attempted an experimental theatre.

Fresh from his successes at the University of North Dakota,

Cornelia Spencer Love is a former member of the staff of the University of North Carolina Library.

Proff Koch—with his contagious enthusiasm, his sparkling, dynamic personality—enlisted the help of the entire community, and all those who had had any dramatic experience whatsoever were eager to join in the new project, The Carolina Playmakers.

Professors Archibald Henderson, George McKie, John Booker, "Parson" Moss of the Presbyterian Church, Assistant Librarian Charles Baker, were among those who served on a committee to hear the first students in the playwriting class read their original one-act plays, and select those best suited for production. A similar committee auditioned the try-outs, as the boys and girls from coast, mountains and plains—many of whom had never seen a play on the stage—shuffled and stumbled over their first attempts. Not that there was a dearth of talent among these youngsters. On the contrary, in Elizabeth Taylor and Katherine Batts, in George Denny, Jonathan Daniels and Hubert Heffner, actors were developed of a high order. They were supplemented by experienced older players, such as Mrs. Sturgis E. Leavitt, formerly a teacher of elocution, Mr. McKie, and others.

My own connection with the Playmakers, in its early years, came about because at Radcliffe College I had both acted and worked behind the scenes in the "Idler Club" performances. I offered my services, and was put on the casting committee, and also given charge of stage "properties." In the former capacity, I have a vivid recollection of hearing the tall stripling Tom Wolfe, reading his first play, *The Return of Buck Gavin,* to the prospective contestants. One boy after another tried the leading role, but none could do it. Finally Proff said, "Tom, you must take that part yourself. You *are* Buck Gavin." In one of the scenes he was called upon to drink some sort of a liquid. Tom admonished me, in my function of property-mistress, to "be sure it is something good!"

I had to provide all the articles used in the plays—dishes, cooking utensils, a letter, etc. For Mrs. Leavitt's old witch, in Elizabeth Lay's *When Witches Ride,* I concocted a necessary toad out of a lump of plasticine. Householders were freely called on to lend articles of furniture, and they were most generous in their response, especially since handling was not of the

gentlest, in the stress and hurry of back-stage shifting. Mrs. Kluttz, in particular, could be counted on.

Of course I had to attend dress rehearsals, and stay until the very end, which sometimes was two o'clock, to collect the "properties" and keep them safe for the next performance. Proff was totally oblivious of time, the rehearsal went on until he was satisfied. He was in his element in conducting a rehearsal—directing, dashing up on the stage to demonstrate just what he meant, quick to praise the good, tactful and sparing of tender feelings in criticism. Indeed, during the reading of plays under consideration, one often felt that his critical faculties were somewhat in abeyance. *All* his geese were swans, and the advice of his committee was imperatively needed, to sift the wheat from the chaff. But Proff's great contribution was his insistence that these youngsters, fresh from their schoolrooms, search out the folklore, the history, the everyday living of their native towns and hamlets. They wanted to write of city villains, high society, profound social problems. Proff even allowed some of these atrocities to be perpetrated. But the playwrights were skillfully deflected to the tragedies and comedies of the life around them, with Paul Green depicting the hardships of the tenant farmer's wife in *Fixin's* and local history in *The Last of the Lowries*; Dougald MacMillan's preparing a drama of the sea, *Off Nag's Head*; Wilbur Stout and Ellen Lay writing a comedy of country folk, *In Dixon's Kitchen*; and so on.

At the advent of Proff, Chapel Hill boasted no theatre other than the "Pickwick" movie house, but the high school had a good auditorium, and with the addition of a curtain and some alterations backstage, this was used for several years. J. J. Lankes was called on to design The Carolina Playmakers' monogram, the "CP" which now appears over the proscenium arch. He also made a little program drawing, showing the pirate, the cottager, and the mountain cabin. Mary Graves Rees made a poster design. In his programs, and all other printed material, Proff was a perfectionist, allowing only paper of the best quality, the most suitable type and carefully written notes concerning each play. All of these were preserved in his office file.

Some of the first readings were held in the Koch home, on

East Rosemary Street. There were hardly any cars in the village, and nobody thought anything of an evening walk, early or late, either to the Koch home or to the campus. As his work became more and more absorbing, Proff spent much of his time on the campus, while Mrs. Koch kept house. Two more sons were born to them in Chapel Hill, and ultimately they bought the comfortable house at the corner of Rosemary and Glenburnie, built by State Geologist Holmes.

As more and more students came to the University to work with the Playmakers—some of them attracted from distant places—gradually an assisting faculty was added, and the outsiders were no longer needed. Students were used in all the acting parts, and costumes, scenery and settings were taken over by others who were studying the technical side of play production. But those who shared in the pioneering of The Carolina Playmakers will never forget the fun of those early days, or the inspiration derived from association with the rare spirit who was their fountainhead, Frederick H. Koch. He had a little pin made, based on the "CP" monogram, and presented it on the occasion of the annual Twelfth Night Revels to those who had done outstanding work in any field of the drama. I cherish a hand-tinted photograph of Proff, garbed as a dashing Mercutio, sword pointed to toe, and inscribed, "Ever your Fellow Playmaker—Mercutio! F. H. K. 1936."

AMATEURS

by Elizabeth Lay Green

When Proff Koch came to Chapel Hill I was one of twenty-five women students there. I immediately fell under his spell—indeed he hypnotized the entire university community. Professors, students and townspeople were soon trying all sorts of undreamed-of skills. I joined Proff's playwriting class and wrote a play. On the little Peabody stage Minnie Sparrow, Tom Wolfe and I read our own work before the Play Selection Com-

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Elizabeth Lay Green, wife of Paul Green, is an author in her own right. She was Professor Koch's first secretary at the University of North Carolina.

mittee. Then we all pitched in to help produce the first program of plays.

Other inexperienced but enthusiastic amateurs were at work. Students who had never seen a play were learning lines, professors were constructing footlights and scenery frames, their wives were collecting costumes and properties—all for the pure love of the work, and with no previous instruction. What more natural than that I should start off to clothe the first log-cabin plays in canvas with no better guide than the little paper-bound pamphlet "Scene-Painting for Amateurs"! I can see that little booklet now—an English compilation with lists of materials all calculated in pence and shillings.

Of course we would have preferred the materials and formulas of the Irish Theatre artists. But we took what was at hand—evil-smelling carpenter's glue from the hardware store, unbleached bedsheeting, dry colors from house-painters' bins. Mary Thornton, Josie Pritchard and I were to do the painting but we found the process very different from the watercolor sketching of young ladies' schools. First the stage crew boys had to make us frames on which to stretch the dampened muslin which had been previously sewed together into sheets the size of the log-cabin walls. When these sheets had been stretched and tacked and sloshed with nasty-smelling glue-sizing, the feminine Scene Painting Committee took large house-painters' brushes in their timorous hands and approached the canvases, now propped upright against the studio walls.

We had taken long walks to make sketches of authentic old log-cabins around Chapel Hill. We had noted the mellow tones of age and weather, we had sketched details of mud daubing, window fastenings, shutters, door latches and the like. Yes, we knew what the walls of the log cabin would look like. But our first coat left the canvas resembling a chocolate layer cake. None of us had ever handled tempera colors which dried several shades lighter than the applied shade. We had never painted for stage lighting nor for broad general effects. That first scenery received more coats of paint, more individual brush strokes and shadings and retouchings than any scenery before or after.

Finally it was finished, cut from the frames and hauled onto the schoolhouse stage. Then the stage crew had its problems to solve. The three walls of the cabin were mounted on rollers and hung like window frames on the stage framing and at the corners the canvas had to be tacked to the supports behind. This tacking and hammering, together with the bumping and hoisting of the heavy rollers, prolonged the dragging intermission waits—and also got Proff into bad habits of long curtain speeches aimed to help the audience forget the sound.

But how wonderful it was when Buck Gavin strode through the low canvas doors, sat at his plain pine table and soliloquized to the bunch of violets in his hands; when Mr. McKie and George Denny poked up the stage-effect coals in our canvas fireplace and listened for Mrs. Leavitt riding in on the stage-effect tin thunder—all this coming to reality in the very shadows and corners of our own creation!

So that was the real amateur spirit, and the effects we achieved were not so bad either. At times the whole Playmakers gang would take a hand at painting and there was nothing our crude enthusiasm would not attempt. There was the time we constructed a heathen idol of fish-glue and boiled newspapers. And then the wine-colored moldy old room we designed for *The Man of Edenton,* and the way the dry paint sifted down over the leper woman because we had forgotten the sizing glue. We were often in difficulties and we were always being harried from one work room to another—the school basement, the Engineering basement, then the attic of the Alumni Building.

It was all a lot of fun, serious fun, for there was nothing more fascinating than what we were doing. We often worked all night, just as the Playmakers have been doing ever since, without thought of anything but the final show. And our reward was a delight greater than we ever dreamed. At that moment when the curtain rose and our own creations as living characters began to move in the living scene, at that moment our pride and enthusiasm crowded out every other thought or feeling. For, as Proff Koch was always telling us, we were true *amateurs,* in the original sense of loving our work.

MEMORIES OF "PROFF" KOCH

by Hubert C. Heffner

Late in the spring of 1918 it became known on the Carolina campus, especially to those students in the Department of English who were interested in writing, that Dr. Edwin Greenlaw, that great teacher and administrator, had succeeded in securing for his departmental faculty a special instructor in drama and playwriting, Frederick H. Koch. In the autumn, when we returned to the campus, "Proff" Koch, as he quickly taught us to call him, was established in an office in the old Library Building, with a seminar room next door. The man himself was something of a surprise to us. He was slight in stature, breezy and friendly in manner, with something of that hail-fellow-well-met Western manner that was quite in contrast to the usual sedate faculty deportment towards students. He wore a belted Norfolk tweed jacket, a flowing Windsor tie, and pince-nez glasses on a black ribbon around his neck. This attire and his breezy manner would have won him scorn and satire among the students had we not soon discerned beneath these his tremendous enthusiasm, his genuine interest in students, and his great capacity for friendship.

In that first autumn he organized a class in playwriting. Among the students in those early classes, as I remember them, were Elizabeth Lay (later to become Mrs. Paul Green), Paul Green, Wilbur Stout, Tom Wolfe, Minnie Shepherd Sparrow, Dougald MacMillan, and others in addition to myself. "Proff" spent many hours in those first classes, as he did in later ones, telling about the experiences of the Dakota Playmakers, about how various Dakota Playmaker plays came to be written, and about the importance of utilizing native materials from the region in which you were born and brought up. Often he read from these plays and from the Irish plays, as well. Sometimes some of us were perhaps a bit bored with his constant recalling of past incidents, students, and plays, and by his repeated readings. We

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Professor Heffner is Professor of Speech, Theatre and Dramatic Literature, Indiana University.

did not realize then that he was actually practicing an entirely new technique of teaching and that at the heart of his technique lay the development of enthusiasm and belief in one's self. Soon he had the sparks flying and the wheels turning and soon he had each student recalling incidents, characters, folk ways, old songs, traditions—all kinds of ideas and materials that conceivably might go into the fashioning of plays.

From the first, he emphasized the idea of producing the plays that were written, but there was no place on the Carolina campus in which a play could be given. Gerrard Hall had no stage. Old Memorial Hall not only had no stage but was acoustically impossible. At last "Proff" secured permission to use the Auditorium of the old High School, located approximately across the street from Bruce Strowd's garage. In those makeshift quarters we produced the first bill of one-act Carolina folk plays, consisting of *What Will Barbara Say?* a romance of Chapel Hill by Minnie Shepherd Sparrow; *Buck Gavin,* a tragedy of a mountain outlaw by Thomas Wolfe; and *When Witches Ride,* a play about the witch Phoebe Ward, by Elizabeth Lay. On this first bill I helped with the painting of the scenery under Elizabeth Lay's direction and with the stage lighting under Professor Parker Daggett of the Department of Electrical Engineering. There was no question but that Elizabeth Lay's play was the outstanding piece produced on this first bill; but the whole bill made quite an impression and was widely discussed on the campus. "Proff" and The Carolina Playmakers were off to a splendid start.

With this first program "Proff" began that series of "curtain talks" during the change of scenery which occurred between the first and second play. Later, on the Playmakers tours, he would joke about these "curtain talks," especially when we would signal him that the set-up was ready for the second play and it was time for him to close the talk. He had a standard joke about George Denny's or (later) about Hubert Heffner's getting the hook and pulling him behind scenes. Occasionally, when "Proff" was really steamed up, we wished grimly that his joke was more literal than funny. These "curtain talks" were, however, one of his methods of "sowing the seed," of propagandizing, if you will. In this respect "Proff" was without doubt one of the greatest

masters of propaganda and public relations which this nation of "salesmen" has produced; but "Proff" was the salesman of an idea, of a vision. In a very few short years he made his work at Carolina and the Carolina Playmakers nationally known. He wrote that work and that organization indelibly into the script of American theatrical history and made that work and that organization an incalculable asset to Carolina students and to the State as a whole. I am proud to say that I am one of the many, many students who profited in countless ways from "Proff" Koch's presence on the Carolina campus. He showed me a career of absorbing interest, gave me some valuable training for that career, and placed me in my first university teaching position after I had completed the Master of Arts degree. Later, he brought me back to Carolina as a member of his faculty and bade me Godspeed when four years later an attractive offer pulled me elsewhere. Above all of this, he gave me his friendship, one of the most priceless gifts within the power of man.

It would be impossible to prove, but in my estimation the Southern Literary Renaissance was in no small measure a result of the work and influence of "Proff" Koch. I would not be misunderstood in this statement. Such men as Tom Wolfe and Paul Green would have gone ahead as writers even though "Proff" had never appeared in their lives; on the other hand, some of their interests, some of their awareness, some of their distinctive points of view would not have appeared in their works as they do, without the influence of "Proff". In no small measure the great development of outdoor pageant dramas in North Carolina and elsewhere stems from his work and, perhaps, from his *Raleigh, the Shepherd of the Ocean.* Certainly he must be ranked alongside George Pierce Baker as one of the two pioneer leaders in the American educational theatre movement.

As with any great, vital, dynamic personality, it is difficult to estimate "Proff's" far-reaching influence. Perhaps I may sum up that influence in two sentences: He was instrumental in helping many, many young men and women to become conscious of themselves and their potentialities. He was equally instrumental in helping North Carolina and the South to become conscious of their cultural possibilities, of their way of life, and of the

value of their peoples. What more could a mortal do, or want to do?

FREDDY FOLKPLAY

By Archibald Henderson

In the spring of 1796 there was called to this infant university a strolling player from London, William Augustus Richards, as tutor of French in the preparatory school. A passionate devotee of the stage, he at once induced the literary societies to join in substituting a dramatic performance for all other duties as society members. During the first commencement which lasted from July 11 to July 15, 1796, some plays were produced in the Old East Building, the oldest building now standing upon the campus of any state university in America. This is probably the first time plays were produced for credit in any institution of higher learning on this continent. A century and a quarter later there was called to this university the twentieth century incarnation of William Augustus Richards, our own Frederick H. Koch, founder and director of The Carolina Playmakers, whose fame has gone from one end of the continent to the other and now reaches back to London, the birthplace of that early strolling player.

With two figures in our pioneer history, whose picturesque lives and humanitarian impulses have deeply touched my imagination, Daniel Boone and John Chapman, I wish to associate a third, Frederick Koch. As a lad at Salisbury in this state I thrilled to the stories, heard at my father's knee, of Daniel Boone who once lived with his bride only nine miles away. Perhaps the name of no American is so closely identified with as many parts of this great country as is that of Boone. This nomadic wanderer, a strolling player upon the vast stage of pioneer America, was born in Pennsylvania, sojourned for a brief interval in Virginia, and finally settled down in the great valley of the Yad-

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Archibald Henderson, Kenan Professor of Mathematics, *Emeritus*, at the University of North Carolina, is the author of *Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet* and other works on Shaw and European drama.

kin. When Boone began his wide-ranging explorations, Florida, Tennessee, and Kentucky lured him on. And throughout a long life Boone continued to wander, to discover, to admire—West Virginia, Louisiana, Missouri—Westward ho! ever Westward —even to the far reaches of the Yellowstone. The history of the Western country he declared was *his* history; and he voiced a pious faith in his mission in these memorable words: "An overruling Providence seems to have watched over his life, and preserved him to be the humble instrument in settling one of the fairest portions of the new world."

In the first years of the nineteenth century a strange figure began to be observed in the Middle West, drifting down the Ohio River in a singular craft consisting of two canoes lashed together and freighted with a cargo of apple seeds gathered from the cider presses of Pennsylvania. This was John Chapman, a native of Massachusetts, who as a boy was in the habit of making long and solitary wanderings in quest of birds and flowers. He had a benevolent passion for planting apple seeds in remote places, and leaving them to grow until they were large enough to be transplanted by the settlers who eventually would make their clearings in the vicinity of these lovely young orchards. It was because of these pomological benefactions that Chapman won the quaint pseudonym of "Johnny Appleseed." Old settlers would recall that, with an eye for beauty, he invariably chose sites such as an artist or a poet would select. Regarding the ripening fruit as a rare and beautiful gift of the Almighty, he devoted his life in great measure to disseminating this rich blessing throughout the Western wilderness. His knowledge of grasses, herbs, plants, shrubs and trees and of all forest lore was so profound that the Indians, among whom he wandered unmolested, regarded him as a "great medicine man." A poetic vision of this singular nomad is caught in these lines from Vachel Lindsay's notable contribution to American literature:

"Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed,"
Chief of the fastnesses, dappled and vast,
In a pack on his back,
In a deer-hide sack,
The beautiful orchards of the past,
The ghost of all the forest and groves—

In that pack on his back,
In that talisman sack,
Tomorrow's peaches, pears and cherries,
Tomorrow's grapes and red raspberries,
Seeds and tree souls, precious things,
Feathered and microscopic wings,
All the outdoors the child heart knows,
And the apple, green, red, and white,
Sum of his day and night—
The apple allied to the thorn,
Child of the rose."

Like Johnny Appleseed, who
with bard's imagination
crossed the Appalachian,

Frederick Koch is another "benevolent monomaniac" who has wandered this continent from end to end, the United States, Canada, and Mexico, everywhere sowing the seeds of dramatic art for young America. His monomania is a simple, undiluted passion for inspiring people, of all ages, races, and climes, to write folkplays. Like Johnny Appleseed, Koch the master teacher of the arts of theatre and drama and inspirer of dramatic composition, is universally regarded by his fellow-craftsman as a "great medicine man." Like Boone, with a sense of a mission and in response to the lure of the forgotten folk of America, Koch too has

Yearned beyond the skyline
Where the strange roads go down.

This strolling player, this wandering sower, and singer of the beauties of art has reaped an amazing reward—in the rich and abundant harvest of the folkplay of the entire American scene. Wherever he has dropped the seeds of art, talent and inspiration and aspiration have sprung up like magic and flourished luxuriantly. The story of the American people, in countless obscure places and forgotten localities, is coming to life and finding expression in the American folkplay—original authentic, autochthonous. And so, I offer you a new name to add to those of William Augustus Richards, Daniel Boone, and John Chapman, I give you

FREDDY FOLKPLAY!

From *The Carolina Playbook*: Commemorative Issue, Edited by Archibald Henderson; June, 1940.

IMAGES OF FAITH

By Jonathan Daniels

Looking back across more than thirty-five years, the picture in my memory of Frederick H. Koch's first Carolina Playmaker activities is one of almost countrified amateurism. Koch was talking, talking, talking about such things as democracy in the drama, the folk-lore of the people, the community of art. But he looked almost the personification of tea-cup culture. Even in 1918 his tweed Norfolk jackets and black Windsor ties seemed less the garb of an artistic revolutionary than a costume which might be related to china painting or decorating wood with burned-in designs. Certainly the preparations for the first Playmaker productions looked then as they look in memory like the activities that attend staging the class play in any country high school. Chapel Hill could still qualify as a sprawling country town then. Maybe its high school auditorium was better than the ones available in most small towns. Most of the actors, playwrights, and others connected with the productions had graduated from similar productions in other small towns. Koch as their leader seemed just about as sophisticated as Grand Forks, North Dakota, from which he had just come.

I think it was a blessing that that was true. I become a good deal less sure as I grow older just what should be the stage set for a revolution in art or anything else. I am sure we are too much dominated by metropolitan images. We have been over-persuaded that revolutions take place over barricades or sidewalk cafe tables along city avenues. I begin to suspect that most revolutions are already in full momentum before the cities are aware of them and claim them. The portrait of the revolutionary is almost always a caricature or a misrepresentation.

After thirty years I begin to understand—what I felt in 1918 without quite understanding—that Koch did begin or at least help make a revolution in the high school auditorium at Chapel

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Jonathan Daniels, author of several books, including *A Southerner Discovers the South* and *Tar Heels*, is Editor of *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, N. C.

Hill. If he had come from Broadway to Chapel Hill, trained in a theatre with perfectionist notions about staging, playwriting and acting, the differences between him and those he invited to join him in an artistic renaissance in Orange County would have been much too great. As one of his first young actors, I am aware now that the enthusiasm he showed then for young actors, writers and producers could have been, instead, the despair of an exile from city theatres. It was Koch's greatness that he could give to young hams some feeling that the only differences between them and any Drew or Booth was irrelevant, immaterial and imperceptible. The same went for playwrights, scenic designers and make-up assistants. Now I understand that he never saw us, but only the image of a faith.

And we never really saw him. He was never just a professor from North Dakota where he had dramatized his first rural players in his own enthusiasms. It did not occur to us that he was less a man because he was less a scholar than most of his colleagues in the English Department. The important thing was that he did not just bear our clumsiness, he made it seem, in a State with hardly a vestige of any tradition in the arts, the clear evidence of a tradition of which we were to be co-founders. It was almost as if he said and meant it and proved it by saying so, "Today we begin our tradition." He did not wait for renaissance. He announced it in advance. He made us believe. And among the believers were such converts as ungainly mountain boy and successful campus politician, Tom Wolfe, and that eager country boy and ex-ball player, Paul Green. There were others. And I have a hunch that some like them even now are benefiting by the improbable push of Koch's always improbable but always beautiful faith.

I am not sure I know what a great teacher is. I think Koch was one. He was no great shakes as a scholar. In the theatre, as in his own life, he was often as corny as North Dakota in August. He was never ashamed to be a ham actor to the end of his days—ashamed? O he positively adored to be. In the theatre and in his classroom, however, he was a beautiful egotist who had the rare gift of bolstering and blessing the pride of young "artists" in themselves. Sometimes his students in acting and

writing learned more from each other than from Koch but only because Koch was the kind of man who could transmit enthusiasm and set it stirring all around him.

Without being too boastful as a North Carolinian about the "renaissance" he helped effect at Chapel Hill and all around it, it can still be said that he did help begin a "renaissance" almost by fiat. That needs, however, to be amplified and explained. Koch may be set down as the founder of the Playmakers. He was, however, only one lively item in the growth of which it was a part. It could be said with much truth that the whole growth was begun by a man who was dead before Koch arrived in Chapel Hill or had ever been heard of in North Carolina. Edward Kidder Graham is better remembered as a President of the University who contributed much to its spirit before he died much too soon. It is less well remembered that he was a professor of English and a dean who brought to Chapel Hill the wonderful English Department to which Koch came. Graham brought to Chapel Hill that great scholar and teacher Edwin Greenlaw, who, as such a scholar as Koch never even pretended to be, still appreciated the lively, enthusiastic, far from scholarly playmaker in North Dakota and brought him to North Carolina. I am sure Koch understood that the development in the arts which has sometimes seemed to grow from the Playmakers grew actually from the fact that he was a part—only a part—of one of the best English Departments any university ever possessed. I do not forget Holly Hanford, Addison Hibbard, Norman Foerster, Johnny Booker. Certainly anybody tracing the literary origins of Tom Wolfe will have to go not merely to Koch's Playmakers but to Eddie Greenlaw's classes in the drably and sparsely furnished room at the north end of Old East. If a tradition in the arts was begun, it was begun in understanding of a rich and ancient heritage and not merely in new enthusiastic playing, play acting and playwriting.

"Proff" Koch may not be entitled to the dimensions of a major prophet now. I think he is. He was not, however, one working in a wilderness. He was a volatile part of a serious, soundly planned, splendidly staffed enterprise in letters and life which has now blessed North Carolina for more than three decades.

PROFESSOR KOCH AS TEACHER

by Paul Green

I believe that good teaching is the forming and guidance of students into the realization of their best possibilities. And I believe too that much of our modern teaching in schools, colleges, and universities fails to bring out these possibilities—nay, too often stifles them and sends the student out into life distrustful, over-critical, uninspired and worst of all lacking a directive faith in himself, his fellows and the world around him.

Since the time of Darwin a hundred years or so ago, our western education has inclined more and more to be scientific, non-religious, non-inspirational and so-called practical. The emphasis has been on things and facts and the behavior of things and facts. Our best brains and talents have busied themselves in seeking to understand material phenomena and the secrets of physical relationships and causes and effects. A tremendous technological progress has resulted but without a commensurate ethical and cultural progress. Our main effort has been to provide by cunning formulae and inventions a better manipulation and control of physical forces and projects and the making of gadgets for man's use and enjoyment—for man as a natural, non-spiritual being, as an animal of the animal order if you will, who lives, loves, fights, kills, makes laws, breaks them, dies and presently returns a crumbling clod to the heart of the eyeless world from which he sprang.

This sort of teaching, this sort of behavioristic philosophy is by its very nature discouraging to the higher hopes and aspirations of mankind and must lead ultimately to despair, lead even to a world condition like the one which now prevails where the best educated nations (best educated in a scientific sense such as Germany, England, the United States) find themselves nerve-hung in an ironic situation of international antagonisms from which there seems no way forward nor any way backwards. For it is the nature of irony that no matter what action the protagonist

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Paul Green, novelist, short-story writer, but especially playwright, is the author of *The Lost Colony* and *The Common Glory*. He lives in Chapel Hill.

takes, the result is mockery. And so in this, our present political stultification, a festering and decay set in and leadership and greatness go to inhabit elsewhere.

Well, yes, there is a way out and it lies in the direction of idealism, of a dedication to truth and the principles of a humane and civilized humanity—a man as a soul, a spiritual creative being.

The engineer, the pragmatic scientist is only part of a man. The fulfilling part is the priest, the poet, the philosopher, the artist. These come not first in time nor space nor condition but first in value and emphasis of concern. At least it seems to me so.

Professor Koch was not a scientist, was not a philosopher, but he instinctively had a sound grasp of the principles of true creative teaching. Apply his methods—if you can call them methods —to the training and guidance of young people, and these same young people would thrive abundantly, did thrive abundantly.

More than once I heard him say, "The longer I live the surer I am that what people need is not criticism but encouragement." And Proff did encourage people. He made them feel that they could do things, beautiful and noble things. His particular field was the drama, but his idealism would have had the same significance in other fields. The categorizing, labelizing, marshalling of forces and influences to derive a poet forth, for instance— the cataloging and catechizing dear to the professional scholar, he felt were of small importance compared to the experiencing of the wonder and glory of the subject at first hand.

"It is not the history of the flower," he said, "nor it's name that is meaningful. In the deepest sense, it is the flower itself, the beautiful flower!"

Proff then was in the business of raising flowers, flowers of the imagination. His warm personality helped them to take root. And always the timid out-reaching tendril-twined student tended to unfold and grow in the sunlight of his favor.

His way of teaching was not popular with the scientific and scholarly professors. It couldn't be, no matter how much they might like him as a man. They considered his methods hit or miss. In fact he had no methods. His dislike for painstaking research or historical process offended their outlook and area of values. He was an enthusiast. And findings and contentions of

enthusiasts are always in the final analysis—their phrase—likely to be unreliable. They found his class assembly more like a group picnic than a meeting of serious workers. And as for his courses in Shakespeare, they were pretty farcical. He acted before his class. He read aloud. He recited. It was all Koch and no Shakespeare so they said.

But the students would come away from his classes quoting Hamlet —

> "I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood
> Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres—"

or walk solemn and dewy-eyed under the spell of Ophelia's sweet and piteous suffering, murmuring to themselves—

> "White his shroud as the mountain snow,—
> Larded with sweet flowers;
> Which bewept to the grave did go
> With true-love showers—"

or mutter out in inner deep delight some of the mouthings of the murderous and sullen Macbeth—

> "And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more."

Proff made his students feel Shakespeare, he infected them, he inspired them with Shakespeare. Even when the message was mournful, his sense of the beauty of the poetry was uplifting.

And from his playwriting classes came a flood of plays, some of them good.

Proff was an inspirer then, not a discourager. Despair was not in his heart, not in his world. He was creative, and his students felt this creativity and responded with their own.

This was good teaching, this was right teaching!

And in this book written and edited by his able successor, Samuel Selden, his students affirm that fact again and again as they remember him.

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